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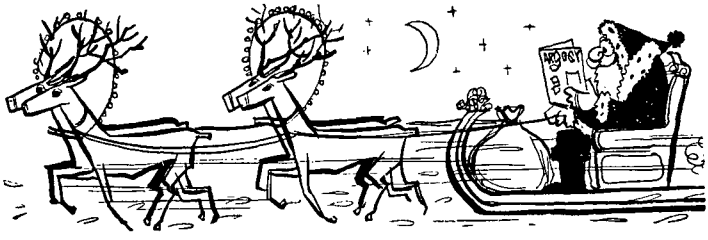

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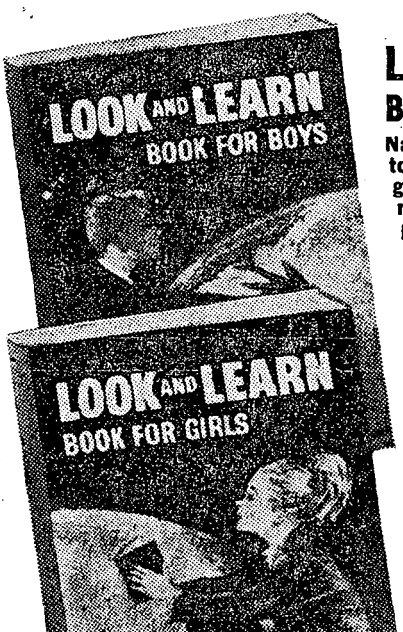

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CONFIRMED in bachelorhood, it has always been our practice to avoid railway carriages with children in them. A few weeks ago, however, returning with Old Uncle Horatio from a foray to the Argosy printing works in Manchester, we found with dismay that the train's only vacant seats were in a carriage that was empty save for two small children; suspiciously empty, we felt, but it was a four-hour journey, so, capitulating, we got in and sat facing them. They were an eldritch pair, in the region of seven or eight, fair-haired, with domed intellectual brows and inscrutable expressions; it was impossible to determine their sex. They appeared to be quite unaccompanied.

After they had surveyed us for a moment or two and the train had started, one tot turned to the other and said in a portentous and significant manner:

"In."

There followed a silence of some minutes while No. 2 thought this over. Then he made a gnomic and deliberate reply:

"Gin."

Horatio, who loves to break the ice, at this moment chimed in helpfully: "Put. It." Both tots turned and eyed him with freezing severity. He cowered in his corner, abashed.

"*Ring*," corrected No. 1.

No. 2 capped this quickly with, "Grins."

"Singer," riposted No. 1.

"Ingress."

"Dressing."

Here followed a long pause. Beginning to catch on I hopefully suggested, "Addressing."

"You may only add one letter," said No. 1 tot sternly.

"I give up," said No. 2. "That makes me 1,025 and you 1,371."

"Can you do Argosy?" I suggested rashly.

They gave me pitying looks.

"Ay, ray, gray, Grays, Argosy," snapped No. 1.

"Or, Roy, orgy—or rosy—"

"—or gory—"

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"—gorsy, Argosy," chimed in No. 2.

"What's gorsy?" Horatio said feebly.

"You've heard of a gorsy hillside, haven't you?"

"If you don't like that, how about As, sag, sago, Argos, Argosy?"

Horatio began to look wild-eyed.

"As sags the sago, long ago,
The rosy orgy's gory, so,"

he muttered to himself. I quickly brought out ham sandwiches and passed them round. Food induced calm but, when we had finished, the infernal brats were off again.

"At, sat, teas, taste, estate . . ."

Hastily I began telling Horatio the plot of a film I had seen. It was obvious why the carriage had remained empty. I talked louder and louder until Horatio fell asleep. But his nap was a troubled one, broken by twitches and muffled groans. When we reached London and I shook him awake, he first fixed me with an uncomprehending stare, then, elbowing his way out of the mists of sleep, cried in a voice of triumph, "Gasometer!"

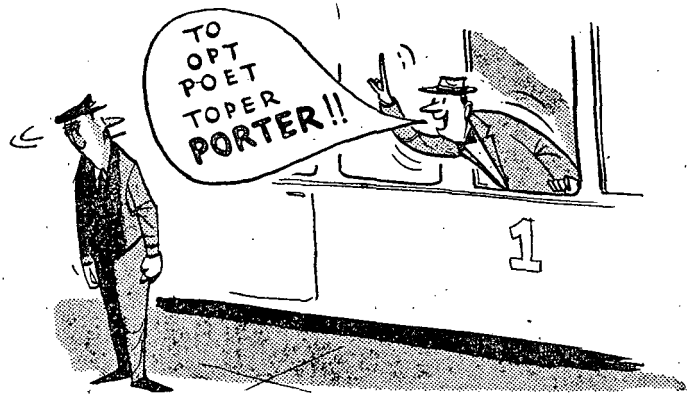
I still brood about the stages by which he reached that one.

We travel by air now. The mere sound of a guard's whistle is enough to start Horatio on "Is, his, shin, hints . . ."

We avoid children and keep our noses safely buried in Argosy.

JOHN SILVER

GASOMETER?—it's possible! Horatio did it. We did it. Can you? 2 guineas for the most original answer received by Argosy, Fleetway House, London E.C.4.



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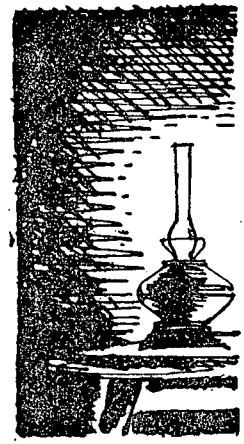
CLOAK OF FIRE



BY BRYAN MACMAHON

IT WAS late afternoon as, gripping my young nephew's hand in mine, I toiled along the track that led upward from the dunes. In my other hand I carried a suitcase containing the boy's clothes. Before me a rabbit dragged a lazy rump into the furze that grew at the landward side of the track.

"Come, Brendan," I said. "This place will be different from the city, but you will be happy here just the same."

The boy made no reply. He looked dismally up to where a huddle of houses crouched under a mountain whose northern flank had been sheered to form a cliff face above the sea. Following the boy's gaze, I sought and found the white face of the cottage which had been pointed out to me by the postman in the village.

After walking for a while, I stopped and turned to look backward at the view spread below. The boy turned too. Together we saw the tents of the mountain range that all but ringed the bay. To the east, on a ridge above a village, was a red-roofed shed in which the Gaelic language was taught during the summer months. The western ocean was all silver: this silver was shining fiercely on the roof of my car, which was parked at the mouth of the strand. At the ends of the headlands the Atlantic swell recurrently bloomed into spray.

"Speak Gaelic only, for here it is still alive," I advised the boy. "That is what I have brought you here for, to learn your own

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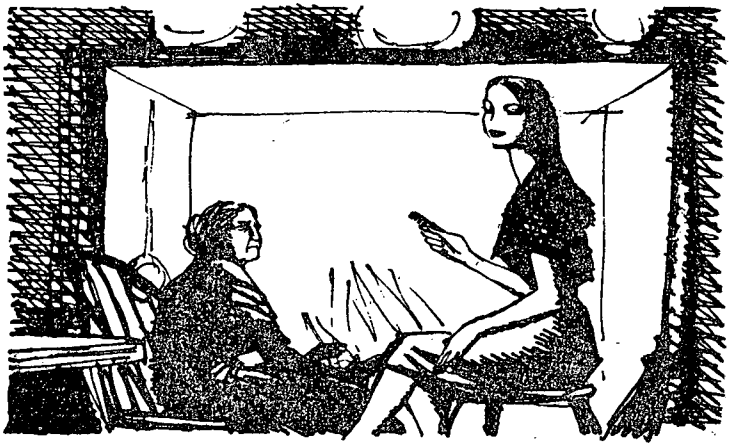

And after, would there not be a taste of ashes?

language." Brightly, I added, "Here, too, you will have sheep and a sheepdog. And, of course, cows and hens."

The boy looked sidelong away from me.

"If the people of this cottage keep you," I went on, "I bet you'll cry with loneliness when your time comes to leave. The people here are so . . . so . . ."

So what? I asked myself, and failed to find an answer.

Brendan looked silently at the hills, the bay, the dunes. He then eyed the ragwort in bloom beside the track.

"When you have been settled in the cottage," I said, "I'll go back to the village for a meal. Tonight I'll return to say good-bye. Early in the morning I'll return to the city."

The boy's lower lip began trembling.

"No tears!" I said, taking his hand and resuming our upward journey. "Remember that this place, remote as it is, represents the Ireland of long ago. I want you to live in it, if only for a few months of summer. Before long the world will break in upon this way of life. Now you are only ten, but later, when you are a man, you will look back with pride and say, 'Yes, I saw it before it was no more!' You understand?"

The boy began to say something but, thinking better of it, stopped short and fell silent.

"Up!" I said cheerfully.

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The boy's hand tightened in mine. We moved on.

Presently we reached the houses. They faced in different directions, and some of them had caps of old thatch held in place by nets weighted down with dangling stones. Cowdung was everywhere underfoot. I crossed over a stream by a crude bridge of flagstones and walked towards the gable of the cottage I sought.

As I did so, I was aware of faces half seen in the dim interiors of the houses. I realised that these were the faces of the old. I realised, too, that the strange silence that hung above the place was due to the absence of children's cries.

Beside the gable, a break in a dry-wall gave on to a shabby enclosure. Here nasturtiums grew in crude beds made of motor tyres. The front of the cottage had been freshly whitewashed and there were three dormer windows half-in and half-out of the slated roof.

As we entered the enclosure, a sheepdog came bounding out and rushed past us to do puff-ball battle with hens scuffing at the gable. I felt the sweat ooze through the boy's hand as the dog swept by.

The open doorway was a step above me. Peeping through it, I saw a wide airy kitchen. Directly opposite the doorway was a settle-seat. At first I thought that the place was empty. Then I saw a girl sitting near the far corner of the kitchen. She had her back turned to us. Her head was bent and her hair was down about her face. In the act of combing her hair, she was stilled as in a dream.

Out of an eye-corner I saw the boy look sharply up at me. Suddenly I grew conscious of the pounding of the sea.

I stretched out my hand to knock on the doorpost, but held my knuckle poised.

As the sheepdog came bounding back, the boy gave an exclamation of alarm. The girl looked up. Her face was flushed and wildly alive. Pegging her hair back over her ears, she sprang to her feet. Until she had betrayed herself by glancing down, I had not noticed that her feet were bare. The girl—she was eighteen at most—blurted in Gaelic, " Cad é? "—What is it?

Releasing the boy's hand, I came up the step. As I did so I was conscious of an access of power.

" Cad é? " she asked again, as I walked forward.

Quietly, my mind not fully on my words, I began to explain, in bookish Gaelic, that I wanted to find a place where a boy could stay. She did not appear to follow the drift of what I had to say. Glancing at the suitcase, she answered me in broken guttural sentences. The village, the cart, her grandmother who would be back later—that much of her meaning I caught.

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Poetry, short stories, drama, reviewing, and radio script-writing—Bryan MacMahon has tried them all. His surviving ambition: the mastery of the ballad. Nothing delights him more than to hear one of his own soaring in triumph above the noisy clamour of a fair-day pub.

Born in the market town of Listowel in Co. Kerry, he revelled in the rivers, lakes, and mountains of his lovely countryside, bounded on the west by rolling Atlantic breakers, on the north by the Shannon estuary, and on every hand by the richest folk lore in the world.

Much of his casual education was gathered in the workshops of local saddlers, smiths, and shoemakers, where he listened, fascinated, to the thrust and parry and magic of words. His own stories move as swiftly from sorrow to joy as the cloud shadows on his beloved lakes and rivers, and this tale, " Cloak of Fire," bears their brilliant, quicksilver enchantment.

Then the girl looked past me and saw the boy.

" A Dhia na Glóire! " she breathed—God of Glory—" a boy! "

She started to rush past me, but checked herself. She raced through the open doorway of a bedroom under the stairs, and came out again quickly wearing a pair of once-fashionable slippers. She then hurried to the enclosure.

With women who move past me in agitation, I go by smell. It is the bull and the stallion in me, for these male animals are in me and in every man. The smell of her I found wholesome and exciting.

Outside the doorway, the girl, her face a-shine with delight, had crouched before the boy. She held his hands in hers. Endearments fell from her lips. " Son of my heart," " My share of the world," " O, my only, only treasure "—these appellations I heard and mentally translated from Gaelic into English. The boy seemed to be struggling with the pleasurable turmoil of his inadequate age.

Again I heard the insistent beat of the sea.

After a time the girl seemed to realise that the boy did not understand her fully, so she began to address him in hesitant English.

" White-child, I understand—yes. But here you will stay! A cock with a red comb we have. On the mountain you will see the turf-basket—it slung across the ass's back. Together we will have sport and we milking the cows. When my grandmother

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will come home, she will put cartloads of welcome before you. At night, too, the old man will come in to tell stories."

"Stories?" I asked.

The girl came to her feet. She glanced at me as if I was an eavesdropper. As she returned to the kitchen, the boy followed her, as a calf follows a cow.

I was suddenly aware that I was superfluous. The child and the girl were engrossed in each other. So, after a time—having first promised to return from the village at nightfall when the girl's grandmother would have come home—I made my excuses and went away. The boy did not seem to mind my leaving him in the cottage.

At dusk, I returned. Thoughtfully I drove through lanes lined with fuchsia blossoms brilliant in the headlights, swung off the narrow road, hopped on a rutted lane, switchbacked on the hummocks of the sandhills, by-passed the loud mouth of the strand, swished through a stream, accelerated on the rough incline, and at last pulled up at a point where, later, I could turn the vehicle without the risk of pitching into the ravine beside the track.

I locked the car and strode upward. The smell of the sea flowers was powerful on the night air. The wind had freshened. There was no moon.

After a time my eyes sensed rather than saw the sliced-down mountain: guided by its shape I moved upward. At a corner in the track I blundered into muck. Wild iris blades slapped against my trousers-ends as I strode on. I crossed the slab bridge and swung in by the cottage gable. I knocked at the door; the door was opened from within, and I entered the kitchen.

Inside I saw a variety of people, middle-aged and old, obviously neighbours. An erect old woman came forward to greet me. My eyes went over her shoulder to see the girl, now prettied up and brilliant in a red dress. A yellow nasturtium was set naïvely in her hair.

By the open hearth an old man was seated—obviously my entrance had made a break in his storytelling. Brendan stood beside the storyteller: on his face was an expression of impatience, directed, I saw readily, at me.

The grandmother, her hands held out in welcome, greeted me warmly. Under her thin grey hair her eyes were brown and her face was a crisscross of age lines that gave her complexion a dark cast. She addressed me in Gaelic that had a faint nasal resonance to it.

"The boy—he will be all right with us," she said. "See! Already he feels at home. We have fallen in love with him. My

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sorrow that the young people have gone from us across the sea." Then, " Have you eaten? " she asked.

I told her that I had just finished a meal at the little inn in the village.

Brendan was eager. " An scéal! " he said. " The story! "

But the old storyteller had become encased in offended dignity. I begged leave to mingle with the people at the end of the kitchen; eventually I took a seat near the foot of the stairs. The girl pleaded with the old man to resume his tale. After a time he relented. The girl smiled at me and, raising Brendan from his seat, sat in his place and clasped her arms about him.

A gust of wind roared in the chimney. The old storyteller spread his hands before the fire, and began to speak.

" With the fall of night," he said in Gaelic, " there came a storm that'd blow the horns off the cattle. The King's son journeyed on until he reached a cottage by the shore. He knocked at the door but no one opened it. He lifted the latch and went in. By the light of a pine-knot aflame in a crack in the wall, he saw a girl seated by the fire. The girl was combing her hair. Seeing him enter, she stood up, pushed her hair back over her ears and looked at him without speaking . . ."

For me there were two fires in the kitchen: the fire of blazing peat to which the storyteller seemed to be addressing his tale, and the fire that was the girl in the red dress, her arms laced about the boy.

" As the prince looked at the girl," the old man went on, " he found his heart snared with love. Suddenly the girl snatched a cloak from her shoulders and flung it about the prince's head. The cloak went on fire. The prince clawed at the blazing cloak. As he did so, his hand touched the girl. She tried to break away, but he gripped her roughly and pressed her to him. The cloak fell to the floor and quenched. The prince felt the air grow cool about his face. The girl smiled up at him and nestled closer to his body . . ."

The girl I could see out of an eye-corner—her cheek was on Brendan's cheek, her eyes were alight, and her lips were apart as she listened to the tale.

" Just then an old man came into the cottage. He had a sack slung across his shoulder. In the sack was something wet and heavy. ' A young bull seal,' the man said. ' I clubbed it on the head at the edge of the tide. Now it is dead.' He set the sack down in a corner of the kitchen.

" Later the old man made a bed of rushes beside the fire. The prince lay down on it, drew his cloak over his head, and was soon fast asleep. In the dark morning hour he awoke. Above the

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sound of the wind he heard like as if it was a human voice crying in the distance. 'Ro-o-o-ana!' the voice said. As the prince came to his feet, the sack in the corner stirred. Then the seal in the sack began weakly to answer the voice calling in the far-away . . ."

The girl—for me, her dress a flame, her body a flame. I was envying the boy where he stood with the girl's arms tight about him.

" The king's son heard a footstep behind him. He turned. The girl was standing there. 'What is it?' she whispered. 'Listen!' he said. Together they listened. 'The young cow seal is calling from the shore,' the girl said. 'Together we will take the sack to the tide.' She threw her cloak about her shoulders. The prince lifted the sack and accompanied the girl. They came to where the tide was a white animal rearing in the dark. They saw a black shape in the broken inshore water. Its head was twisting this way and that. 'Ro-o-o-ona!' it cried.

" The prince and the girl caught the sack by the toes and spilt the young bull seal out on the sand. The seal hobbled towards the tide. The prince and the girl stood and watched while the seals caressed and made off into the sea. Then they went back to the cottage . . ."

As the story went on I found that passion was like a stairway mounting before me. Is it inevitable? I asked myself, my head fixed in one attitude, yet my eyes straying to the red dress. Is there no power strong enough to keep me out of the arms of this girl? Is it ordained that her fingers should falter up along my face, her young fragrance be in my nostrils, her body come congruent to my body? Must I, of compulsion, answer her call?

I resolved to test what appeared to be the inevitability of my fate. I was determined to prove that I was stronger than a clubbed seal thrust into a sack and slung into a corner.

The storyteller ended his tale. The boy, loaded with sleep, almost fell out of the girl's arms. With a cry, the girl raised him and carried him up the stairs. The storyteller and the neighbours stood up, bade their guttural good-byes, and headed off into the night. The old woman and myself were left alone in the kitchen.

I sat on a rope chair, looking down at the dying fire. Upstairs the girl's humming was a caress set to music. Once, as the old woman moved to the fire to set a saucepan of milk on crushed embers, I tried to catch her gaze, but it seemed as if her eyes were deliberately avoiding mine. I heard the sound of a door creaking slowly shut and the light footsteps came down the stairs. " He's asleep! " the girl said, her face alight with excitement.

Sitting at the table-head, I drank a mug of hot milk with a blob

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of butter in it, and ate a buttered sector of bread made from Indian meal. Serving me, the girl moved swiftly about. As the old woman passed the delf on the dresser, her face seemed to grow darker still. The meal ended, I thanked them both, murmured something about paying for the boy's keep and prepared to go. The girl looked sharply at her grandmother.

The old woman said wanly, "Ná fanfair?"—Will you not stay?

I gestured vaguely in reply.

"Here we have an empty room," the girl broke in, indicating a doorway to the left of the hearth.

"The bed is aired," the old woman added. "You need not trouble about your car—no one ever comes that road." After a glance at the girl: "If you have a case in the car, Shivaun will get it for you. Give her the key."

I stood in indecision.

The girl saw my pause. "Yes—yes!" she said. "In the morning the boy may be lonely for you. For tonight—you will stay?"

I felt my lips murmur acceptance. "The lock of the car is hard to manage," I said lamely, looking at the car keys in my hand.

"The girl will go with you, and show you the way." The old woman was standing in the doorway of the bedroom at the foot of the stairs. I noticed that there was something of sadness in her tone as she addressed me.

"Yes!" the girl said, in such a controlled tone that I could only guess at the forces it held in check.

Together we went out into the night. The mountain towered above us. The girl did not go by the track—she went by a series of low stiles across the fields. At last we came to a gap in the low cliff where, below us, the sea was an animal rearing in the dark. The girl went down to the beach. On the dry sand she took off her shoes and then stood on tiptoe looking about her. She glanced at me where I stood, a little distance away.

Night, sand, sea, stars, cloaks of fire, headlands, hills, dune smells mingling with the smell of fresh sweat on a body grown lately into womanhood, the memory of the caressing seals—all began to attack me fiercely. I moved. The girl moved. The pretext of a gust of wind flung her against me. I caught her and swung her round to face me. As I had anticipated, her body was firm and warm.

For a moment she was close to me, then she broke away. I followed her as she raced across the strand, making for the corner where the dark cliffs were. "Shivaun!" I called, but my cry only served to make her increase her pace.

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As I ran, I was taken with the terror that I had touched a spring of ungovernable emotion in the girl and that she now intended throwing herself into the sea. This fear made me race the faster. I was at her heels when, like a hare dodging from a hound, she swerved to the right and raced into a cave. I followed her, sensed her in the dark and, in a lull of wave thunder, pounced on her, again gripped her, and swung her to face me. Using all my strength I bore her backward until I had her pinned against the cave wall.

" Cad é? " it was my turn to ask—What is it?

Of her tears, her broken phrases in Gaelic and English, her odd gestures, I could make no sense. She kept twisting her head this way and that. Nothing that I could do or say would comfort her. Caress was out of the question. She was like a wild-born kitten that had been brought into a house for the first time.

After a time I cast her from me. Then I strolled to the comparative brightness of the cave mouth, lighted a cigarette and, setting my shoulder against the rock, looked upon the powerful world outside. Presently I knew that she was behind my shoulder. Even when I found her hand faltering, first on my shoulderblade, then on my shoulder, I didn't turn.

Her voice was level, as she said in English, " Please! You do not understand! "

I drew deeply on my cigarette.

" How hard it is for you to see how life is in places such as here," she said. " Here it is all dream and story. The gull with the broken wing, the rabbit wounded by the snare—these sorrows I can suffer. But the coming of the boy—that is made terrible because so soon he will go away. The same it is with you—only deeper. So real you are, that I will be wounded. If you were always to stay, it would be different. But like as it is now, knowing that I must lose you, it could not be suffered."

In the intervals of silence we had that sense of intimacy as if we had known one another since childhood.

After a time I set an arm round her shoulder and locked my cool hand in her armpit. Side by side we stood, looking at the sea. The waves came gathering, rearing, thinning, toppling, falling, thudding, hissing up and in and away, until at last they died in silence. A seabird flew over us: we could hear the rustle of its wings. I found my eyes searching the inshore water, as if I were seeking the questing head of a seal.

" Kiss me once," I heard her say, " but only as if it is a holy thing to do."

I kissed her as she had asked. Then, laughing, she twisted apart and flung me an invitation to follow her in a game of racing

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across the sand. I took her at her word. This time I was rough with her. Tripping her, as if she were a boy, I caught her ankle as she fell and threw her down sideways. With a cry of joy she rolled over and, finding her feet like a cat, was off again to renew the game. I began to yell at the wind, at the waves, at the sea, at the girl dodging swiftly before me. At last, tiring of the sport, she took my arm and, tightening her nails deep into my upper arm, shuddered fully. Then she directed me to the point where she had left her shoes. There, shaking her shoes free of sand, she leaned calmly against me as she donned them. Together we moved to the car.

That night, hour after hour, I tossed without sleep. I dropped off once but awoke with the feeling that a cloak of fire was about my face. It must have been three o'clock when I swung out of bed and told myself that what I needed was a drink of water. I recalled seeing a white enamelled pail of water on the ledge of the dresser and, after spending a short time looking out of the bedroom window at the ragged sky, I slipped on my showerproof coat over my pyjamas, opened the room door and quietly entered the kitchen. As I did so, I heard the sheepdog pad on the gravel outside the window.

Tiptoeing forward, I took a cup from a brass hook on the dresser, dipped it into the pail and, leaning against the dresser, began to sip the water.

My eyes kept straying to the doorway of the room beneath the stairs.

The kitchen was quiet and strange. As I continued to sip, the house seemed to draw a common breath of expectation. Once I glanced at the corner by the fire, as if half expecting to find there a sack containing something wet, heavy, and alive.

For a long time I stayed there. I kept asking myself if it had all been pretence on the girl's part; if she had been playing a game designed to bring me to the climax of this hour. Again I glanced at the room door, then drained the cup and placed it on the dresser ledge. I began to retrace my steps but, coming to a sudden decision, turned and moved forward to the doorway of the girl's room.

I was almost there when I heard a door creak. I glanced at the doorway of the companion room at the foot of the stairs. Behind the newel post I saw the face of the old woman. I stood still. As my eyes found hers, she came forward to meet me. She had a small shawl thrown about her shoulders.

"You are there?" she said softly.

"Yes!"

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She padded forward until she was quite close to me. "Can you not sleep?"

"No!"

"Sit on the chair, son!"

After a pause, I sat on the rope chair beside the fire. The old woman took the tongs and raked out the fine seed of fire from the ashes. As she did so, her face was coloured by the glow from the embers. I saw the tongs drag to a halt on the flag of the hearth.

"It is the strange bed that prevents you from sleeping," she said. "That—and the youth that's in your blood. You and me," she added, with a lilting sigh, as if what she was saying was part of an old song. She glanced at the store of fireseed she had heaped together, then set the tongs against the wall, and stood before me.

"Give me your hands, son," she said.

I gave her my hands. She kissed each of my palms in turn, then pressed the backs of my hands against her face.

"She with her arms about the boy," the old woman said. "Me with your young hands to my old lips."

I did not reply.

"What am I to say to you, son?" she went on. "Go now, and take her in your arms? And then, after the wrong, would there not be a taste of ashes in the mouth?" Again she kissed my hands. "I do not know," she said wearily. "Between man and woman, God has made a long war, to which there are many truces but no peace."

With a deep sigh, the old woman released my hands. She moved a few paces away from me. As she did so, I noticed the shadow of coquetry to her carriage. She stopped. Her hands grew uneasy.

"The fire that's in ye both is no stranger to me," she said in a strained tone. "When I was twenty-one, by my manner of walking alone, I could draw men to my side. Once, in Chicopee Falls in America, there was a young Greek with a head of curls and eyes of lightning who . . . who . . .

"Your hands!" she cried in a broken voice.

The old woman pressed the backs of my hands fiercely against her face. There again, as in the granddaughter, was the shudder and the nails digging into my palms, only this time they were weakened by the span of years.

"O Holy Angels!" the old woman said. "I, too, have known the cloak of fire about my face.

"I came home to marry an old fisherman," she went on, "and bear one daughter, whose one daughter this is." Dropping my hands: "I tell you, son, that everything in me bids me encourage you in what you are tempted to do. But, then, she is too lovely

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to break. And again, after the rattle has stilled in my throat, will I not have to answer to God for my guardianship?" She sat on a chair before the fire. "Stay with me, son," she pleaded. "The stress on both of us will soon pass."

I stayed with her in the kitchen until morning was grey in the window.

"Now!" the old woman said, rising to her feet.

I went back to bed, slept soundly and rose late. Breakfast was a prosaic meal of porridge, tea, and eggs. The boy took little notice of my good-byes. As I was going away, Shivaun set him on the donkey's back and led the animal up the mountain. Walking down the track, I turned once. The old woman was just inside the doorway, watching me go. Shivaun and Brendan did not turn at all: they moved steadily upward to where the mountain bulked against the sky.

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Into the morning

Then said Christian, He hath turned the shadow of death into the morning

JOHN BUNYAN, *The Pilgrim's Progress*

14 *March*, 1430

She [Jeanne d'Arc] asks that if she is taken to Paris she may have a copy of her questions and answers, in order that she may give them to the people in Paris and say: These are the questions asked me in Rouen, and my replies . . .

Saint Catherine had told her that she would receive help . . . And furthermore the voices have told her that she would be delivered by a great victory. And later, her voices said to her: *Take it all cheerfully. Do not despair on account of your martyrdom, for in the end you will come to the Kingdom of Heaven.* This her voices told her simply and definitely, without faltering.

The Trial of Joan of Arc,
verbatim report from the Orleans mss.

For November 11

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

LAURENCE BINYON

In Memoriam A.H.

Auberon Herbert, Captain Lord Lucas, R.F.C., killed November 3rd, 1916.

I wondered what they meant,
That flaming firmament,
Those clouds so grey so gold . . .
So much of glory and so much of storm . . .
It meant that now the last time you and I
Should look at the golden sky,
And the dark fields large and flat,
And smell the evening weather,
And laugh and talk and wonder both together.
The last, last time. We nevermore should meet
In France or London street,

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Or fields of home. The desolated space
Of life shall nevermore
Be what it was before.
No one shall take your place . . .
There is none like you. Yet not that alone
Do we bemoan;
But this; that you were greater than the rest,
And better than the best . . .
And in the portals of the sacred hall
You hear the trumpet's call . . .
You hear the solemn bell
At vespers, when the oriflammes are furled;
And then you know that somewhere in the world,
That shines far-off beneath you like a gem,
They think of you, and when you think of them
You know that they will wipe away their tears,
And cast aside their fears;
That they will have it so,
And in no otherwise;
That it is well with them because they know,
With faithful eyes,
Fixed forward and turned upwards to the skies,
That it is well with you,
Among the chosen few,
Among the very brave, the very true.

MAURICE BARING

They [Scott, Wilson, Bowers and Oates] were in evil case but they would have been all right if the cold had not come down upon them; unexpected, unforetold and fatal.

On 29th March Scott wrote: " My dear Mrs. Wilson. If this reaches you, Bill and I will have gone out together. We are very near it now and I should like you to know how splendid he was at the end—everlastingly cheerful and ready to sacrifice himself for others, never a word of blame to me for leading him into this mess. He is suffering, luckily, only minor discomforts.

" His eyes have a comfortable blue look of hope and his mind is peaceful with the satisfaction of his faith in regarding himself as part of the great scheme of the Almighty. I can do no more to comfort you than to tell you that he died as he lived, a brave, true man—the best of comrades and staunchest of friends.

" My whole heart goes out to you in pity.

" Yours R. Scott."

APSLEY CHERRY-GARRARD, *The Worst Journey in the World*

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The Hour of Sleep

Now that I am home again
What do I notice? Chiefly the moon
That from the Duporth hill looks down
Upon my garden of roses and
The surrounding seas of sleeping corn:
Silence and stillness, the silence of sleep.
After the unceasing noise of planes
Going and coming, filling the skies,
The pulse of engines, the beating of the heart,
Not even the beating of birds' wings,
Nor the flowers' alert: they are in deep
Sleep. Only the murmuring cries
Of distant gulls in echoing coves
On the coast. Now the pink foxgloves
Nod sleepily in a little wind.
Over the lip of wall the green waves
Of landscape reach out, fold on fold,
To the headland and the slumbering sea.
Yet I cannot forget that beyond
The silence and stillness, the contentment
Of moon, young corn, and nodding flowers,
Battle rages in Normandy.
All the landscape holds its breath
For some this hour of sleep is the hour of death.

A. L. ROWSE, *Poems of Deliverance* (*Cornwall*, 1944)

All the Trumpets

After this, it was noised abroad that Mr. *Valiant-for-truth* was taken with a summons by the same post as the other; and had for this a token that the summons was true, *That his pitcher was broken at the fountain.* When he understood it, he called for his friends, and told them of it. Then, he said, I am going to my Father's; and though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me, that I have fought his battles who now will be my rewarder. When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the river side, into which as he went he said, *Death, where is thy sting?* And as he went deeper, he said, *Grave, where is thy victory?* So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

JOHN BUNYAN, *The Pilgrim's Progress*

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TOUCH AND GO

It was obvious
that this had happened before

BY DARRELL BATES

"WHAT will you drink?" said Hallam Jones. He had a high-pitched precise voice that carried right across the room.

"That will be eight and nine," the barman said. Hallam Jones took out his wallet, and with a movement as precise as his voice he extracted a note and put it on the bar.

"Let's take our drinks over there."

He picked up the change and turned towards the corner where the sun made a pale autumn pattern on the surface of the well-worn leather chairs.

". . . and there's nine and a penny owing, sir," the barman said, "for your friend . . ."

I felt Hallam Jones check his stride, and for a moment he stood quite still. I saw the fingers of his free hand close slowly into a tight, knuckle-gleaming fist. Then he turned, took out his wallet, and put a ten-shilling note on the bar.

We walked over to the corner, and sipped our drinks and talked about his holiday in Spain. Soon afterwards we went into the club dining-room for lunch. Nothing was said about the curious incident at the bar.

"Excuse me a minute," he said when we had finished. He went across to the desk to pay the bill.

I waited for him at the door. But even so I could hear from across the room the rising note of indignation in his voice. When he joined me his face was slightly flushed.

"Let's go and have some coffee in the other room.

"The fellow," he went on in a lower tone of voice, "had lunch in there as well."

I hadn't the slightest idea, of course, what or whom he was talking about, but I didn't say anything. We sat drinking our coffee and it was some time before he spoke.

"Are you in a hurry?"

I looked at my watch.

"No," I said. "I'm all right for another hour."

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"Well then . . ." he began.

I didn't know Hallam Jones very well. But that morning I had been to a meeting in his elegant high-ceilinged room that looked over Green Park. The meeting hadn't gone very well, and when the others had gone he turned to me.

"For God's sake," he said, "let's get out of here. Come and have some lunch at my club."

Hallam Jones was fifty-one but he had a pink downy face and a large protubing forehead that made me think of a well-washed baby of parents with a high I.Q. He had a good brain but he had no more idea of how the world worked, or of the strings that were pulled or manœuvred and cut to work it than my Aunt Magdala's house-bound cat. He ought to have been a civil servant, or a publisher perhaps. In fact he ran a very successful travel agency. How he survived and flourished in that highly-competitive cut-throat world I never knew.

He sat there now in the coffee room of his club. He smoked thin black cigarettes, lighting a new one every time from the stub of the one before. His fingernails, I saw, were newly manicured and had been touched with a colourless veneer of polish. He didn't look as if he ever had to shave.

I sat in a chair, smoking one of his club cigars, and waited for him to begin.

"He came in here," he started without any preliminaries, "two or three days ago. He told the porter at the door that he was meeting me and that I had asked him to wait in the bar. He sat there patiently, it seems, for a quarter of an hour. Then he got up and spoke to the barman.

"'I'm waiting here for Mr. Hallam Jones.'

"'Yes, sir,' said the barman.

"'He said he'd be here at half past twelve.'

"'I expect he'll be here soon, sir,' the barman said.

"The man sat down again. Five minutes later he went back to the bar.

"'I don't think, do you,' he said, 'that Mr. Hallam Jones would mind if I ordered myself a drink?'

"The barman looked at him while several quiet long seconds ticked on the clock.

"'Very well, sir,' he said at last. 'What would you like?'

"'I think,' the man said, patting his pockets, 'I'd better take a packet of cigarettes as well. I've run out.'

"'I'm afraid I can't sell things to non-members, sir. It's a rule . . .'

"'Very well,' the man said, taking a packet. 'I'll pay Mr. Hallam Jones when he comes.'

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"At a quarter past one the man got up and went over to the barman.

"'It doesn't look as if Mr. Hallam Jones is coming, does it?'

"'No, sir,' said the barman.

"The barman got a little book out of his pocket and wrote the figure down, and the name.

"'What does it come to? I'll settle with Mr. Hallam Jones when I see him next.'"

After that it seems the man went into the dining-room. He sat at an empty table, drumming his fingers for ten minutes and looking at his watch, and in the end when he had told his story they let him order lunch. Once again when no Hallam Jones appeared to pay the bill it was written down in a small black book.

"Have you seen him," I asked, "since then?"

"I haven't seen him," Hallam Jones said, "for twenty years . . ."

"How very odd," I said.

As odd, I thought, as the fact that it was obvious from the way the barman spoke that this had happened before.

"Yes," he said. "What do you think I ought to do?"

He seemed curiously innocent and defenceless about the whole affair. And I had the feeling too that an ordinary straightforward answer, like telling the police or anything like that, wouldn't somehow meet the case.

"Has it happened before?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "once or twice."

"Why don't you tell the porter not to let him in, and the barman and the people in the dining-room?" It was too ordinary a question, I knew; but I was curious to know what his answer would be.

"Yes, I suppose I should . . ." He spoke vaguely, and I knew that he never would.

"The trouble is," he said, suddenly turning in his chair, "he was such a nice fellow . . ."

"How did you meet him?" I asked.

"Oh, during the war. I was in Intelligence, you know, and for a time in 1941 when I was in Cairo he was in it too."

"Oh," I said. I wondered for a moment if I was in for a spy story of a rather sordid kind.

"He wasn't in it long but I got to know him quite well. Then he left and . . ."

". . . you've never seen him since?"

"That's right," said Hallam Jones, and lit another cigarette. "When did he start coming here, to your club?"

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"About a year ago."

"Do you mean—?" I started.

"Oh no," he said at once. "He's only been here a few times. And he only spends a pound or two." He was defending the man already.

"Why are you telling me this?" I asked. I thought I had better try another tack.

"Well, you heard the barman, and I thought . . ."

I didn't say anything. I was afraid that if I said the wrong thing, or asked the wrong question, he would close up or run away. "It disturbs me," he went on. "It isn't the money. I'm quite well off. It's the feeling of—" he searched his cigarette smoke for the word—"of insecurity."

"Yes, I know," I said.

"Do you?" he said at once, leaning forward in his chair. "Do you?"

"Yes," I lied. "You are worried, aren't you, about what it may lead to, later on."

"Yes. I suppose that's it." Once more he lit another cigarette.

I looked at my watch. It was nearly time for me to go.

"I think," I said, "you should tell the porters not to let him in again. If you let him go on getting away with this the odds are he will try something more. Something more ambitious. If you stop him now there's a chance he may give it up."

Hallam Jones brushed the ash impatiently from his coat. "I can see you don't understand."

I got up, and despite his irritation he walked with me as far as the door.

"What's this chap's name, by the way?"

"You wouldn't know him."

First he had defended him and now he was shielding him too. There was an element of derision as well, I thought, in the way he spoke. I was an out-of-date, unfashionable type. I liked cricket and beer and women and Beethoven, and I didn't like Braque and I never read *Encounter*. This man, his tone implied, was an altogether different, more sensitive type.

But in the end I got my answer all the same.

"Johnson," he said as I started down the steps. "Henry Johnson is his name."

About a month later I met a girl I knew at a cocktail party. At least she was a girl, an ATS girl, when I knew her during the war. Now she had four children and was married to a judge. Her name was Cecilia.

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"Hullo," she said, without much enthusiasm. "How are you?"

She had never really forgiven me for being so friendly with her husband. We often used to go to Lord's in the evening and drink beer outside the Tavern.

While I asked polite questions about the children I remembered that she too had been in Cairo in the war.

"By the way," I asked, "do you remember a chap called Hallam Jones? In Intelligence?"

"No," she said. I didn't think she would, but it made as good an opening as any. "It doesn't ring a bell at all."

"Or a man called Henry Johnson?"

She didn't say anything for a moment. Then she asked me to go and get her another drink.

"Why do you ask?" she said.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Someone I know is thinking of doing some business with him. It's not important. Where's George?" George was her husband.

"It's odd that you should mention Henry Johnson," she said, "because a week or two ago he rang me up."

"Oh yes?" I tried to sound only marginally interested.

"Yes," she went on, "he rang me up. It was surprising really because I only ever met him once. At a party at Shepheard's in 1942. What was also surprising was that he tried to blackmail me. Very polite and very mild, but that was what it was."

"How odd," I said. "What did you do?"

"I rang off."

"Sensible girl. Has he bothered you again?"

"No. And I don't somehow think he will."

"No wonder we all fall in love with you," I said. "Do you know where he lives?"

She smiled with a touch of extra colour in her cheek. She didn't know his address but she had got his telephone number and written it down. "Are you going to beat him up for love of me?"

"Yes," I said. "But first I'm going to make love to George. I think he's got some tickets for the Test Match . . ."

A few days later I met Henry Johnson, by a telephone appointment, in a rather arty pub of his choosing in S.W.3.

"How do you do?" I said when we had located one another. He looked very much at home in the place, as a fungus does on a tree stump. He was about forty-five, and carefully dressed. He looked like an estate agent who was trying to pass himself off as a regular soldier, and had succeeded.

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I spent half an hour discussing a piece of business that anyone with sense would see could only bring in a very small return. He saw it at once, but he bit. He must be fairly hard up, I thought. I had said that Rogerson, his C.O. in the war, had recommended him to me. I had got the name from Hallam Jones.

"Have another drink," I said. I could see that any drinking there was would be on me.

I had met him at half past six. At eleven o'clock I took him along to another place where the girls and the bar didn't have any closing hours. He had a much better head for liquor than I had hoped for.

At a quarter to twelve I tried another line. The place was full of commercial travellers from the Midlands having a good time.

"They look such ordinary people, don't they," I said, "and yet I bet every one of them has a skeleton in his cupboard."

"Probably," he said, and yawned. I wasn't doing very well.

"If," I went on, committed now, "one only had the time to nose around I'm sure one could live on the proceeds like a lord . . ."

"Not like a lord. . . ."

He turned in his chair and faced me.

"If you try and do that sort of thing in a big way you always get caught. The thing to do," he added, "is—would be to play it quietly. A little here, and a little there . . ."

"You can't make much of a living that way," I said.

"No. But you can get by."

I ordered another round of drinks. On a small stage in a corner of the room a fat girl was doing conjuring tricks with nothing on.

"But after all the time and trouble, and money perhaps, you spent in finding things out, wouldn't you expect a decent profit?"

He waited until the fat girl had finished before he replied.

"It's not—it wouldn't be necessary to find things out. It's not necessary at all. Everybody's got something they want to hide. All you need do is to pretend you know something. Their conscience and their memory will do the rest.

"Only," he added, sipping his drink, "don't try to get too much. A meal, a drink, a couple of quid. That's all."

"You wouldn't get fat on that."

"No. But if you play several people at a time it all adds up."

"What happens if they call your bluff?"

"Drop it, old boy," said Henry Johnson. "Drop it at once and try another line."

"Oh," I said. "I see."

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The next morning I rang up Hallam Jones. I didn't tell him I had seen his friend.

"I bet you a fiver," I said, "that if you tell the porters not to let him in you won't see or hear from him again."

Just to be on the safe side I also rang Cecilia. I went to bed that night feeling rather pleased with myself.

About a year later, when I was abroad, I saw a small notice in a London paper saying that Hallam Jones had died. From an overdose of barbiturates. A day or so later I got a letter which had been forwarded by my bank. Inside it was a five-pound note, and attached to it was a card.

You won, it said. *I told the porters, and after they told him he never came again. But the experience has made me feel too vulnerable, and I find I cannot stand the strain . . .*

I suppose that in fairness I should have sent the five-pound note to Henry Johnson. If anybody was the winner it was he. But of course I never did.

© Darrell Bates 1962

"No, no, Mr. Brown, when your time is up WE open the doors!"

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Necklace for a Warrior

IT WAS the season of marriages.

Ahmed Khan, trained sepoy of A Company, Fourth Frontier (Pathan) Regiment, received the letter as he dismounted from guard duty on the ramparts of Fort Jamdhil. The Orderly Room babu offered to read it to him for a small consideration. Ahmed Khan impugned his ancestors and took it out into the bazaar and squatted in the dust in front of the Hindu letter-writer.

"Your honoured father, on whom be peace, writes that the crops have been good," the letter-writer told him. "The she-camel of your mother's elder brother has brought forth twins. You are to give his salutations to the Colonel-sahib. He asks when you are to be promoted and calls you an idle fellow. May Allah smile upon you—and that will be eight annas please."

"What else does he say, flunkey of the pen?" Ahmed Khan growled at him. "My father would not waste money on such belly wind as that alone."

"Much difficulty," answered the other promptly. "Some-

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by Berkely Mather

thing about a wedding—*your* wedding—but the calligraphy of your Northern letter-writers is cramped and illiterate and hard for even an honours graduate of Allahabad University to decipher. Even to try would cost twelve annas."

Ahmed Khan settled for ten and the letter-writer went on, "The marriage has been arranged. She has eyes like a gazelle, is skilled in fieldwork, and cooks and sews well. No man has seen her face beneath the veil, but the women of the family say it is like unto the lotus flowers of Jamshed-levi. The dowry is three cows, seven goats, and a rifle's weight of minted silver rupees. Take leave immediately, your father writes, because the astrologer says the signs are propitious and the wedding must take place on the fifth day of the new moon."

"Write me now another letter," Ahmed Khan told him. "To my Colonel-sahib. It is from my father and it tells him that my younger brother has been stricken with blindness, my grandfather with ague, and the cattle with pest. There has been no rain since the monsoon before last, and the young cry with

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hunger. My father asks that his son be granted a month's leave to attend to these difficulties. May Allah smile upon the Colonel-sahib and send him health, prosperity, and promotion. You will sign it 'Ashraf Khan—pensioner, holder of the Good Conduct Medal, and father of Ahmed Khan, Sepoy Number three-seven-two-nine-five-four-three.'"

"One rupee," said the letter-writer, spitting on his ink-block. "Make it another four annas and I'll put in that bit about the moneylenders foreclosing. It never fails."

The Adjutant-sahib told Ahmed Khan that he really ought to change his letter-writer, as the form was becoming stereotyped, but that since he was due for furlough anyhow, he could go; and that was a pity, because the marriage of Sepoy Malik Shah of Headquarter Company had also been arranged and he was at that very moment telling the Second-in-Command all about the yaws and typhoid that were afflicting *his* family—and the young cried with hunger. The Second-in-Command grinned and told him to get out of his sight and not to be late back.

And so only next morning did the Adjutant realise that two men between whose families there existed a blood feud, had been allowed to go North at the same time.

"Might be all right," he said with an optimism he didn't feel. "Malik Shah saved Ahmed Khan's life when that bridge over the Jumna carried away on manœuvres; and then Ahmed rescued Malik from a brawl with some Sikhs in Lahore."

"Don't kid yourself," said the Second-in-Command gloomily. "A blood feud's a blood feud. Theirs has been going strong for over seventy years. They are the best of pals in the Regiment, no doubt, but they are in honour bound to hate each other's guts as soon as they cross the Frontier. If only we could stop one of them."

But even as he spoke, the two sepoys were alighting from the train in Peshawar. Arm in arm they swaggered through the crowded station yard into the blinding heat, noise, and almost tangible stinks of the bazaar. They went first to the shop of Mizaj Ghafoor, left their uniforms on deposit and hired resplendent Pathan clothing—baggy white pantaloons, long grey shirts worn outside them, embroidered waistcoats, and peacock-hued turbans—and released from their heavy military boots, they curled their bare toes ecstatically in Frontier chaplis. Then they ate at the chai-khana—mountains of mutton pilau spiced with saffron—daintily sifting through the buttered rice with scrubbed right hands, finding titbits which they politely popped into each other's mouths, belching thunderously as courteous appreciation of good

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food demands. They went to other places then, places their fathers might not have approved of, but which would give rise to much sniggering reminiscence when they boasted about it later round the hubble-bubble pipes in their respective villages.

As dawn broke they walked, still arm in arm, to the caravanserai at the edge of the cantonments. To the north the hills towered jaggedly above the Khyber Pass.

Ahmed Khan said, "Here our paths divide. Farewell, my brother. I am sorry our officer-sahibs saw fit to believe our lies at one and the same time, but now it is written. I have a pistol, as doubtless you have also. I will count a hundred after we pass the Frontier post. While I am doing so, it will well behove you to run. Remember our training back there in the Regiment and do not run in a straight line, but rather jink from side to side like the jackal. One of your tribe should not find it difficult."

"May you never be poor or tired," answered Malik Shah sweetly. "I will see that your uniform is returned in good order to the quartermaster's store. Our officer-sahibs shall know that one Khan at least, while a braggart, was not a thief."

Then they held each other's wrists and lightly touched their foreheads together before breaking abruptly and boarding the ramshackle Khyber bus. Ahmed Khan took a seat at the back while Malik Shah placed himself immediately behind the driver where he could see his comrade in the rear-vision mirror. They then stuck red henah blooms behind their ears, and two Hindus and three Moslem women got off the bus hurriedly without even claiming refunds on their tickets.

The driver said nervously, "Not on my vehicle, my brothers. The police infidels this side of the border do not understand affairs of honour, and I am a poor man with a livelihood to earn."

"Are we barbarians?" asked Malik Shah indignantly. "Do you think we brawl on buses, to the discomfort of the travelling public? My friend does not die until he is within decent distance of his family burial ground."

"There is only one lawful place where pigs and Shahs may be slaughtered north of the border," Ahmed Khan informed him haughtily. "That is the Untouchable Camp the other side of Michi Landi Khana. He is safe until then." And they smiled tautly at each other with the muscles round their mouths.

Ahmed Khan sat stiffly. He had to. Under his pantaloons he had the barrel of a light Mannlicher .280 strapped to one leg and the butt to the other. He felt sorry for Malik Shah. It seemed rather a mean advantage to slip out of the dancing-house while his comrade in arms was otherwise engaged, and to buy the rifle at a murderous price in the Thieves' Bazaar. Still, he lived

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longest who thought quickest. It was a nice weapon, worth every anna of the year's accumulated pay it had cost. Bit difficult to get ammunition for this particular calibre but the dealer had thrown three rounds in with it. That would be more than enough. A count of one hundred? Long enough to allow Malik to outwalk the effective range of his own pistol, but still remain within comfortable rifle shot. He must remember to zero his sights. These high velocity sporting toys had no trajectory at all for the first two hundred yards. He would feign the urgent need of a little personal privacy at the last stop before the border, assemble the rifle, load it, and then hide it beneath the seat.

Malik Shah rubbed the Service .38 under his shirt. It belonged to the family. They always parked it at the chai-khana for the comfort and convenience of members travelling back to the village on furlough. He had picked it up when he had paid for their meal, while Ahmed Khan was belching and daydreaming. And now Ahmed Khan was going to die, because he, Malik, was by far the better pistol shot. Had he not been practising drawing and firing for nearly two years, with ammunition stolen from the pistol range back there at the fort? Poor Ahmed Khan. As good a comrade as a man could wish for—south of the border. He wondered who they were marrying him off to. One of their own girls or one from a neutral village? Whichever it was, they were going to be a bridegroom short.

The sun was dropping behind the hills as the bus ground to a stop by the big cairn of stones. The white painted board beside it stated that here was the limit of the North-west Frontier Province and the start of Tribal Territory. Malik Shah alighted from the front entrance, averting his eyes from the rear one. Icy hands seemed to be clasping him round the middle beneath his belt. He knew now that Ahmed had the rifle, because he had seen him assembling it behind a rock at the last stopping place. He knew rage and hatred but no resentment. The Frontier code, strong in principle, was loose in particular. Knife against knife or firearm against firearm—and if a man had the foresight to provide himself with a better weapon, then the devil take the other. His only hope now was to find cover within pistol range, just a sizeable rock he could snuggle down behind, say at twenty-five yards.

His eyes swept the ground around him, and his heart sank. The Frontier Police kept this zone cleared—a hundred yards each way—in order to be able to sweep it with machine-gun fire in the event of tribal trouble. He should have thought of that earlier; but then he didn't know that rat Ahmed had the rifle. He knew that Ahmed would play fair on the count of one hundred, because he had said that before they broke grips at Peshawar.

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There *was* cover to his right—loose rocks and camel thorn—but that was just south of the marker cairn. Ahmed would not fire at him there, but to cross back to neutral territory would be to brand himself a coward. He did, in fact, think of it for a moment, but then he heard the bus start up and hurriedly pull forward, but only far enough to get out of the line of fire. The driver and the other passengers would now be passionately interested spectators. Run back now and the women would be laughing about it round the village wells within hours. He couldn't face that.

Ahmed Khan had counted up to fifty. The rifle lay on the ground in front of him, cocked and zeroed, one round in the breech and two in the magazine. His palms were sweating, so he wiped them on his pantaloons. Why didn't the fool hurry, instead of walking slowly away, his head moving from side to side like that of a marabout bird looking for eels in the mud? He had to do this. He had known it ever since he had been allowed to totter out to the fire in the evenings and sit in the dust, thumb in mouth, and listen to the old men's stories. Seventy years it had gone back, they said, to the boyhood days of his elder uncle—and the score stood even at twelve a side—and both he and Malik were now the elder sons of this generation. Yes, he had to do it, or risk the day when Malik got one up on him, like this.

But in the name of Allah why didn't he move faster? Why wouldn't he get far enough away to make the very distance and difficulty of the shot rob it of some of its squalidness?

He was counting aloud now, yelling so that Malik could hear him. "Fifty-one. Run, you fool, don't you realise that I have a rifle? Fifty-two. Do you want to shame me before these gawpers? Fifty-three. Put a decent distance between us. Fifty-four. Run, Malik, run; if I miss I miss and there'll be no blame attached to me in this poor light. If I don't, you'll at least die with dignity out of sight of these people."

He was begging now, and the tears were streaming unashamedly down his cheeks. "Run, Malik, run. What did they teach us back there in the Regiment? A man is not a coward to run for cover, and to live to fight another day. Fifty-five."

And then Malik, seventy yards away, stumbled over the clump of camel thorn and fell forward and down—fifty feet into the abandoned well.

He hit with a hollow splash, sank deeply, and struggled in mad choking panic. Like most dwellers in these dry uplands, he could not swim and had a terror of water. His clawing fingers found a niche in the slippery stones of the wall, and he clung limpet-like,

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his head just clear of the surface. He peered upwards to where the mouth of the well made a tiny circle of light against the darkening sky, and he cursed hopelessly. Ahmed, he knew, would not shoot him down here like a rat, but he would be under no obligation to pull him out, either—not unless he agreed to capitulate and kiss the sandals of the other. That would end the feud, but thereafter a member of his tribe would have to drop his eyes when he met one of the other side, and the Shahs would be for all time to come the moral and social inferiors of the Khans. He knew, also, that nobody else would dare rescue him, because that would mean the taking of the feud into another family.

No, he would have to drown, and hope that Akhbar, his twelve-year-old brother, would make a better fist of things when he came to man's estate. He felt under his shirt and his heart sank further. He had lost his pistol in the fall. He could not now make one last defiant gesture if Ahmed was foolhardy enough to look down over the parapet at him.

A voice came faintly to him from above. "Don't shoot, Pathan-ji. It is I, the driver. Your enemy sends terms."

"Tell him what he may do with them," snarled Malik, and went into lewd details.

"He will procure a rope and pull you out, but you know the code, and must accept it on the beard of your father, the name of your mother, and the sacred bones of Pir Ijazat of Faqiri," went on the driver, and added pleadingly, "it is written, Pathan-ji. One cannot belch in the face of one's kismet. Accept it like a sensible man. Your enemy does not lack generosity and even now weeps for you; but the code is the code and he is bound by it. Let him drop a rope and then go back in peace over the border."

"And never again be able to face my tribe?" demanded Malik. "Go back to your stink-wagon, carrier of offal, and leave me to die in dignity."

Up above they were still arguing hours later, when darkness had fallen completely. Someone suggested that a rope should be dropped anonymously and left secured, leaving the trapped man to get out or not as Allah willed, but they had no rope long enough. Greatly daring, the driver shone a torch down into the blackness. Malik appeared barely conscious, clinging by instinct alone to the slimy wall, his nose and mouth barely clear of the water.

"If one could descend on a rope now and secure it under his arms, we could pull him to the top and he would not even know," mused the driver. "*If* we had a rope."

"And who would descend?" asked a passenger. "You?"

"I am a poor man with a large family, and a livelihood to

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earn," answered the driver coldly. "And anyhow, it is foolishness. We could only procure a rope at the next village, twenty miles away, and he will not last that long."

And then an old woman who had travelled all the way from Michi Landi Khana on the roof of the bus, cackled shrilly and toothlessly.

"Fools," she said. "Would not the turbans of the men and the strappings of the loads make a rope long enough?"

That made sense, someone agreed, but there still remained the question of who would go down. The crowd started to melt away silently into the darkness.

"You," suggested the driver, who was a kindly man. "As a woman and, more, as an Untouchable who could not even ride among the orthodox inside the bus, you could not possibly draw the feud into your nameless family."

She chattered with rage like a small and shrivelled monkey. "Clinging to your accursed roof for nine hours in the dust, unable even to buy refreshment at the stops for fear of offending someone's precious caste, have *I* the strength to descend? And why should I trouble? What do *I* owe the lordly ones and their kind?"

"A man drowns," murmured the driver miserably.

"Then let him who put the fool there pull him out again," she spat.

"The code—" said the driver hopelessly.

"A pox upon your code!" Her face was convulsed with rage. "What does it mean, anyhow? Even if we pulled him up, the killing would go on apace afterwards."

Ahmed moved to the side of the driver. "I will go down," he said quietly. "Then there shall be a truce between us for two hours. More than that I could not grant without affront to my family honour."

"Keep *that* unsmirched at all costs," scoffed the old woman. "Two hours. Then let the uplands be watered with blood again, and the tears of the women who wasted their suffering in bearing you. Fools, fools, fools!"

But now the passengers were tearing off turbans and knotting load-straps into a rough but serviceable rope, glad of something to do safely and in concert. The old woman wandered off into the darkness . . . .

The water touched Ahmed's feet, rose above his ankles, his knees, his waist. He shouted to the men above to stop lowering. The dancing light of the torch that was fastened to his turban fell upon the now almost completely unconscious Malik. He felt for a handhold in the slimy stones.

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"Careful, my brother," he said gently. "Hold tight while I unknot the rope from my waist. The others will then haul you to the top."

"I take no favours from a Khan," croaked Malik.

"None is offered," said Ahmed shortly. "The feud continues after a two-hour truce, but I'll settle my family's debt on level ground as between men."

"It would still be a favour," said Malik obstinately. "Go away and leave me to die in peace. This way, at least, you will not collect the credit for my death."

"Raise your arms, you fool, while I hold you," snapped Ahmed. "Let me fasten the rope round your waist."

"Fasten it round your neck, like the hangman at Peshawar did to your grandfather," Malik spat.

Above them the passengers were fretting and fuming.

"Come up!" shouted the driver. "In the name of Allah, come up. I shall be fined by my employer for this delay, and I am a poor man with a livelihood to earn."

Then the old woman came back to the group, stumbling in the darkness and breathing heavily as one who bears a heavy load. She dumped a wicker basket on the ground and raised the lid.

"Give light," she commanded, and someone shone a torch on her. She was groping in the basket with both hands, her arms hidden to the elbows. From it rose an unnamable stench. She cackled shrilly and raised something above her head, something that looked like a twisted mass of white and red ropes. There was an uneasy murmur from the onlookers, and the circle widened as they drew back. She hobbled to the head of the well and peered down into the blackness.

"Ho, you below there," she called. "You defenders of the family honour. You mighty warriors before Allah. You lusty despoilers of virtue. Ho, my fine gamecocks with wet feathers. These honest people have had enough of your retching of belly wind and beating upon brass. Call off your feud—now and for the future. I know your stupid code. It can be done by the two principals, and the slur is only on the one that offers the hand of peace first. All right then, offer it together and at one time; then come up and let us be gone to our homes."

"You do not understand these things, woman," shouted Ahmed. "Move away from the well-head. Your very presence defiles the air above us. Tell the others to haul me up, and let my enemy die in peace as befits a brave man."

"And let your brood carry on this nonsense to disturb sensible people?" she answered contemptuously. "Not likely. Up

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together and live as men, or stay together and perish like rats—*in pig-polluted water!*" She raised the armful of ropes and held them poised. "Shine your light upwards, and see what grandmother has for you. Pig guts, fresh from the slaughterhouse of Michi Landi Khana, the *Untouchable* slaughterhouse. Cheap and nourishing. A treat for my family: the first meat they would have tasted in a year."

A howl of rage and disgust broke forth from the circle round her, for the pig is anathema to all True Believers. One or two of them fingered their knives and stepped forward. She tore a loathsome handful from the bundle and waved it threateningly. The circle widened again quickly. From the depths came sounds of distress and dismay.

"Make up your minds quickly," she called down to them. "Come up together as sworn brothers or I drop this little offering down upon you; and not all the saints and mullahs of Islam could get you into your warriors' paradise when you've choked your lives out in that black water. You would be doomed here and hereafter as men who died with necklaces of pig guts, and your families would bear the shame for all time. Come up! I have not yet touched this rope, so these spotless paragons can still handle it. What is it to be?"

She cocked her ear to the urgent mumbling that came up from below. "Right," she cackled at last. "Now repeat after me together, 'I—then your stupid names—swear upon the beard of my father, the name of my mother, the graves of my ancestors, the Seven Unspoken Names of Allah, and on the lives of my children and children's children yet unborn, that the feud of Shah and Khan dies here and now, and that henceforth we shall live in peace. Ullah—Al-lah—bismillah.'" She ended on the long shrill call of the muezzin.

She listened for some seconds to the rumbling that came up from the darkness, then nodded her satisfaction; and in silence two sheepish men were hauled to the surface, and great was the satisfaction of the driver and other passengers at this honourable solution. They streamed off back to the bus, and Ahmed was helping the stumbling Malik, and that which wet their beards was not all well water.

The old woman smiled wearily but contentedly as she watched the lights of the bus disappear in the distance. She had a long walk ahead of her through the darkness now, for, as the driver carefully explained, her continued presence on the bus would undoubtedly give offence to the orthodox since she flatly refused to abandon her reeking basket—and he was a poor man with a livelihood to earn.

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TRAVELS WITH CHARLEY

by John Steinbeck

NIAGARA FALLS is very nice. It's like a large version of the old Bond sign on Times Square. I'm very glad I saw it, because from now on if I am asked whether I have seen Niagara Falls I can say yes, and be telling the truth for once.

When I told my adviser that I was going to Erie, Pennsylvania, I had no idea of going there, but as it turned out, I was. My intention was to creep across the neck of Ontario, by-passing not only Erie but Cleveland and Toledo.

I find out of long experience that I admire all nations and hate all governments, and nowhere is my natural anarchism more aroused than at national borders where patient and efficient public servants carry out their duties in matters of immigration and customs. I have never smuggled anything in my life. Why, then, do I feel an uneasy sense of guilt on approaching a customs barrier? I crossed a high toll bridge and negotiated a no man's land and came to the place where the Stars and Stripes stood shoulder to shoulder with the Union Jack. The Canadians were very kind. They asked where I was going and for how long, gave the car a cursory inspection, and came at last to Charley.

"Do you have a certificate of rabies vaccination on the dog?"

"No, I haven't. You see he's an old dog. He was vaccinated long ago."

Another official came out. "We advise you not to cross the border with him, then."

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" But I'm just crossing a small part of Canada and re-entering the U.S."

" We understand," they said kindly. " You can take him into Canada but the U.S. won't let him back."

" But technically I am still in the U.S. and there's no complaint."

" There will be if he crosses the line and tries to get back."

" Well, where can I get him vaccinated? "

They didn't know. I would have to retrace my way at least twenty miles, find a vet, have Charley vaccinated, and then return. I was crossing only to save a little time, and this would wipe out the time saved and much more.

" Please understand, it is your own government, not ours. We are simply advising you. It's the rule."

I guess this is why I hate governments, all governments. It is always the rule, the fine print, carried out by fine-print men. There's nothing to fight, no wall to hammer with frustrated fists. I highly approve of vaccination, feel it should be compulsory; rabies is a dreadful thing. And yet I found myself hating the rule and all governments that made rules. It was not the shots but the certificate that was important. And it is usually so with governments—not a fact but a small slip of paper. These were such nice men, friendly and helpful. It was a slow time at the border. They gave me a cup of tea and Charley half a dozen cookies. And they seemed genuinely sorry that I had to go to Erie, Pennsylvania, for the lack of a paper. And so I turned about and proceeded towards the Stars and Stripes and another government. Exiting I had not been required to stop, but now the barrier was down.

" Are you an American citizen? "

" Yes, sir, here's my passport."

" Do you have anything to declare? "

" I haven't been away."

" Have you a rabies vaccination certificate for your dog? "

" He hasn't been away either."

" But you are coming from Canada."

" I have not been in Canada."

I saw the steel come into eyes, the brows lower to a level of suspicion. Far from saving time, it looked as though I might lose much more than even Erie, Pennsylvania.

" Will you step into the office? "

This request had the effect on me a Gestapo knock on the door might have. It raises panic, anger, and guilty feelings whether or not I have done wrong. My voice took on the strident tone of virtuous outrage which automatically arouses suspicion.

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"Please step into the office."

"I tell you I have not been in Canada. If you were watching, you would have seen that I turned back."

"Step this way, please, sir."

Then into the telephone: "New York licence so and so. Yes. Pick-up truck with camper top. Yes—a dog." And to me: "What kind of dog is it?"

"Poodle."

"Poodle—I said poodle. Light brown."

"Blue," I said.

"Light brown. O.K. Thanks."

I do hope I did not sense a certain sadness at my innocence.

"They say you didn't cross the line."

"That's what I told you."

"May I see your passport?"

"Why? I haven't left the country. I'm not about to leave the country." But I handed over my passport just the same. He leafed through it, pausing at the entry-and-exit stamps of other journeys. He inspected my photograph, opened the yellow smallpox vaccination certificate stapled to the back cover. At the bottom of the last page he saw pencilled in a faint set of letters and figures.

"What is this?"

"I don't know. Let me see. Oh, that! Why, it's a telephone number."

"What's it doing in your passport?"

"I guess I didn't have a slip of paper. I don't even remember whose number it is."

By now he had me on the run and he knew it. "Don't you know it is against the law to deface a passport?"

"I'll erase it."

"You should not write anything in your passport. That's the regulation."

"I won't ever do it again. I promise." And I wanted to promise him I wouldn't lie or steal or associate with persons of loose morals, or covet my neighbour's wife, or anything. He closed my passport firmly and handed it back to me. I'm sure he felt better having found that telephone number. Suppose after all his trouble he hadn't found me guilty of anything, and on a slow day.

"Thank you, sir," I said. "May I proceed now?"

He waved his hand kindly. "Go ahead," he said.

And that's why I went towards Erie, Pennsylvania, and it was Charley's fault. I crossed the high iron bridge and stopped to pay toll.

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The man leaned out of the window. " Go on," he said, " it's on the house."

" How do you mean? "

" I seen you go through the other way a little while ago. I seen the dog. I knew you'd be back."

" Why didn't you tell me? "

" Nobody believes it. Go ahead. You get a free ride one way."

He wasn't government, you see. But government can make you feel so small and mean that it takes some doing to build back a sense of self-importance. Charley and I stayed at the grandest auto court we could find that night, a place only the rich could afford, a pleasure dome of ivory and apes and peacocks and moreover with a restaurant, and room service. I ordered ice and soda and made a Scotch and soda and then another. Then I had a waiter in and bespoke soup and a steak and a pound of raw hamburger for Charley, and I overtipped mercilessly. Before I went to sleep I went over all the things I wished I had said to that immigration man, and some of them were incredibly clever and cutting.

© John Steinbeck 1962

From his newest book, " Travels With Charley," (Heinemann) in which John Steinbeck drives across the States.

UTTER LIMIT

I entered a carriage full of men all entrenched firmly behind their daily papers. They scowled as I climbed over their feet and not a word was spoken.

Just as the train was moving out the last seat was taken by an American Air Force officer from the very deep South. Within ten minutes of leaving London he had wooed my silent companions from behind their papers . . . In his luscious Southern drawl, which reminded me of honey and treacle, he entertained us for fifty miles non-stop and we all thawed under his charm.

Before he left the carriage at his station he confided to us that he had only been in England for three days. " They told me back home that the folks over here were cold. That you never got places with them without being introduced," he drawled. " But I've sure found them real nice. Kind-a-homey and so ready to talk. Just look at you folks and how welcome you've made me."

One of my companions said, " When you leave us I don't suppose one of us will utter another word."

And we didn't, except for a series of polite " Good-nights, " as each of us alighted in turn at our various destinations.

LADY BARNETT, *My Life Line*

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Slice it as you like—we've had it!

IMPASSE

BY GERALD KERSH

YOU have a sharp eye, sir, a very sharp eye indeed, if you recognise me by those photographs that used to appear in the newspapers and the sensational magazines about fifteen years ago. I fancy I must have changed somewhat since then; but yes, I am Peter Perfrement, and they did make a knight of me for some work I did in nuclear physics.

I am glad, for once, to be recognised. You might otherwise mistake me for an escaped convict, or a lunatic at large, or something of that sort; for I am going to beg you to have the goodness to sit in this shadowy corner and keep your broad back between me and the door. Have an eye on the mirror over my head and you will in due course see the reflections of a couple of fellows who will come into this cosy little bar. Those men will be looking for me. You will perceive, by the complete vacuity of their expressions, that they are from Intelligence.

They'll spot me, of course, and then it will be, "Why, Sir Peter, how lucky to find you here!" Then, pleading business, they'll carry me off. And evading those two young men is one of the few pleasures left me in my old age. Once I got out in a laundry basket. Tonight I put on a workman's overalls over my evening clothes and went to a concert. I intend to go back home to the Centre after I've had my evening, but I want to be left alone a bit.

Of course, I have nobody but myself to blame for any slight discomfort I may at present suffer. I retired once and for all, as I thought, in 1950. My work, as it seemed, was done.

So I withdrew to a pleasant little villa at the Cap des Fesses just outside that awful holiday resort Les Sables des Fesses in the south of France. Fully intended to end my days there, as a matter of fact—set up library and study there, and a compact but middling-comprehensive laboratory. I went to all the music festivals, drank my glass of wine on the terrasse of whatever café happened to take my fancy, and continued my academic battle with Dr. Frankenburg.

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This battle, which was in point of fact far less acrimonious than the average game of chess, had to do with the nature of the element fluorine. I take it that esoteric mathematics are, mercifully, beyond your comprehension; but perhaps you were told at school something of the nature of fluorine. This is the enfant terrible of the elements.

Fluorine, in temperament, is a prima donna, and in character, a born delinquent. You cannot keep it pure—it has such an affinity for practically everything else on earth; and what it has an affinity for, it tends to destroy. Now I had a theory involving what I can only describe to a layman as tame fluorine—fluorine housebroken and in harness. Dr. Frankenburg, most of whose leisure is devoted to watching cartoons, used to say concerning this, "You might as well imagine Mickey Mouse as a bread-winner." However, I worked away not under pressure nor under observation, completely at my leisure, having access to the great computer at Assigny. And one day I found that I had evolved a substance which, for convenience, I will call fluorine 80+.

I do not mean that I made it merely in formula. The nature of the stuff, once comprehended, made the physical production of it really absurdly simple. So I made some—about six ounces of it, and it looked rather like a sheet of hard, lime-coloured gelatine. And potentially this bit of gelatinous-looking stuff was somewhat more potent than a cosmic collision. Potentially, mark you—only potentially.

As it lay in my hand 80+ was, by all possible calculations, inert. You could beat it with a sledgehammer or burn it with a blowlamp, and nothing would happen. But under certain conditions—conditions which seemed to me at that time quite impossible of achievement—this morsel of matter could be unbelievably terrible. By unbelievably, I mean immeasurably. Quite beyond calculation.

The notebook containing my formula I wrapped in paper with the intention of putting it in the vault of the Banque Maritime des Sables des Fesses. The sheet of fluorine 80+ I placed between two pieces of cardboard, wrapped it likewise, and put it in my pocket. You see, I had a friend in the town with whom I often had tea, and he had a liking for the weird and the wonderful. Like the fool that I am, I proposed to amuse myself by showing him my sample and telling him that this inoffensive little thing, in a suitable environment, might cause our earth to go *pssst!*—in about as long as it takes for a pinch of gunpowder to flash in a match flame. So in high spirits I went into town, paid my visit to the bank, first having got a pot of Gentlemen's Relish and a

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jar of Oxford Marmalade for tea, and so called on Dr. Raisin.

He was another old boy who had outlived his usefulness, although time was when he had some reputation as an architect specialising in steel construction.

"Something special for tea," I said, and tossed my little package of fluorine 80+ on the table.

"Smoked salmon?" he asked.

Then I brought out the marmalade and the Relish, and said, "No," chuckling like an idiot.

He growled, "Evidently you have just paid a visit to the Café de la Guerre Froide," and sniffed at me.

"No, I've just come from the bank."

"So," he said, "that's a parcel of money, I suppose. What's it to me? Let's have tea."

I said, "I didn't go to the bank to take something out, Raisin. I put something in."

"Make me no mystifications, if you please. What's that?"

"That," I said, "is proof positive that Frankenburg is wrong and I am right, Raisin. What you see there is half a dozen ounces of absolutely stable fluorine-80+ and a critical mass, at that!"

Dry as an old bone, he said, "Jargon me no jargons. As I understand it, an atomic explosion takes place when certain quantities of radioactive material arrive, in certain circumstances, at what you call 'critical mass.' This being the case, that little packet may, I take it, be considered dangerous?"

I said, "Rather so. There's about enough fluorine 80+ there to vaporise a medium-sized planet."

Raisin said, "A fluorine bomb, an ounce of nitroglycerine—it's all the same to me." Pouring tea, he asked nonchalantly, "How do you make it go off? Not, I gather, by chucking it about on tables?"

I said, "You can't explode it—as you understand an explosion—except under conditions difficult to create and useless once created; although, perhaps, while valueless as a weapon, it could be put to peaceful uses."

"Perhaps me no perhapses. A fighting cock *could* be used to make chicken broth. What did you want to bring it here for, anyway?"

I was a little put out. Raisin was unimpressible. I told him rather lamely, "Well, neither you nor anyone else will ever see fluorine 80+ again. In about fourteen hours that piece there will—as you would put it—have evaporated."

"Why as *I* would put it? How do you put it?"

"Why, you see," I explained, "in point of actual fact, that stuff is exploding now. Only it's exploding very very gradually.

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Now, for this explosion to be effectual as an explosion, we should have to let that mass expand at a temperature of anything over sixty degrees Fahrenheit in a hermetically sealed bomb case of at least ten thousand cubic feet in capacity. At this point, given suitable pressure, up she'd go. But when I tell you that before we could get such a pressure under which my fluorine 80+ would undergo certain atomic alterations, the casing of our ten-thousand-cubic-foot bomb would need to be at least two or three feet thick."

Being a Russian, Raisin stirred marmalade into his tea and interrupted. "It is a chimera. So let it evaporate. Burn your formula. Pay no further attention to it . . . Still, since you have brought it, let's have a look at it." He undid the little parcel, and said, "I knew all along it was a joke." The paper pulled away, there lay nothing but a notebook.

I cried, "Good heavens—that ought to be safe in the bank! That's the formula!"

"And the bomb?"

"Not a bomb, Raisin—I've just told you that fluorine 80+ can't possibly be a bomb of its own accord. Confound it! I must have left it at the grocer's."

He said, "Is it poisonous?"

"Toxic? I don't think so . . . Now wait a minute, wait a minute! I distinctly remember—when I left the house I put the formula in my right-hand coat pocket and the fluorine 80+ in the left. Now first of all I went to the Epicerie Internationale to get this marmalade and stuff, and so as not to crowd my left pocket I transferred . . . Oh, it's quite all right, Raisin. There's nothing to worry about, except that this is not the kind of notebook I like to carry about with me. The sample is safe and sound in the bank. It was a natural mistake—the packages are very much alike in shape and weight. No cause for anxiety. Pass the Gentlemen's Relish, will you?"

But Raisin said, "This horrible little bit of fluorine—you left it in the bank, did you?"

"Fluorine 80+. Well?"

"You bank at the Maritime in Les Sables des Fesses?"

"Yes, why?"

"So do I. It is the safest bank in France. Its vaults—now follow me carefully, Perfrement—its vaults are burglarproof, bombproof, fireproof, and absolutely airtight. The safe deposit vault is forty feet long, thirty feet wide, and ten feet high. This gives it a capacity of twelve thousand cubic feet. It is maintained at a low humidity and a constant temperature of sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit. The walls of this vault are of hard steel

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and reinforced concrete three feet thick. The door alone weighs thirty tons, but fits like a glass stopper in a medicine bottle. Does the significance of all this sink in?"

"Why," I said, "why—"

"Yes, why? You can say that again. What you have done, my irresponsible friend," said Dr. Raisin, "is to put your mass of fluorine 80+ in its impossible casing. That's the way with the likes of you. It would never dawn on you that a bomb might be an oblong thing as big as a bank. Congratulations!"

I said, "I know the manager, M. le Queux, and he knows me. I'll go and see him at once."

"It's Saturday. The bank's closed."

"Yes, I know, but I'll ask him to come over with his keys."

Raisin said, "I wish you luck."

A telephone call to M. le Queux's house got me only the information that he was gone for the weekend to Laffert, about eighty miles inland, up the mountain, where he had a bungalow. So I looked about for a taxi. But it was carnival weekend, and there was nothing to be got except one of those essentially French machines that have run on coal gas and kerosene, and have practically no works left inside them, and yet, like certain extremely cheap alarm clocks, somehow continue to go, without accuracy, but with a tremendous noise. And the driver was a most objectionable man in a beret, who chewed whole cloves of raw garlic all the time and shouted into one's face as if one were a hundred yards distant.

After a disruptive and malodorous journey, during which the car had twice to be mended with bits of wire, we reached Laffert, and with some difficulty found M. le Queux.

He said to me, "For you—anything. But to open the bank? No, I cannot oblige you."

"You had better," I said to him, in a minatory tone.

"But, Sir Peter," said he, "this is not merely a matter of turning a key and opening a door. I don't believe you can have read our brochure. The door of the vault is on a time lock. This means that after the lock is set and the door closed, nothing can open it until a certain period of time has elapsed. So, precisely at seven forty-five on Monday morning—but not one instant before—I can open the vault for you."

I said, "Then as I see it, you had better send for the locksmith and have the lock picked."

M. le Queux laughed. He said, "You couldn't open our vault without taking the door down." He spoke with a certain pride.

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" Then I'm afraid I'll have to trouble you to have the door taken down," I told him.

" That would necessitate practically taking down the bank," M. le Queux said; and evidently he thought that I was out of my mind.

" Then," I said, " there's nothing for it *but* to take down the bank. Of course, there'll be compensation, I suppose. Still, the fact remains that, by the sheerest inadvertence, for which I hold myself greatly at fault, I have turned your bank-vault into a colossal bomb—a bomb compared with which your Russian multimegaton bombs are milk-and-water. Indeed, you would no more weigh or measure my fluorine 80+ in terms of mere megatons than you'd buy coal by the milligram or wine by the cubic centimetre."

" One of us is going crazy," said M. le Queux.

" Call a Hiroshima bomb a megaton," I said. " Dealing with my fluorine 80+ we have to make new tables. So a million megatons equal one tyrrannoton. A million tyrrannotons equal one chasmaton. A million chasmatons make one brahmaton. And after a million brahmatons we come to something I call an ultimon, because it is beyond even the scope of mathematical conjecture.

" In a certain number of hours from now—and we are wasting time talking, M. le Queux—if you don't get that vault of yours open, the universe will experience the shock of half a chasmaton. Please let me use your telephone."

So I called a certain branch of Security, and after that told a minister, who shall be nameless, to be so kind as to get a move on —referring him, of course, to several other nuclear experts, in case my own name was not enough for him. Thus I was able, within twenty minutes, to tell M. le Queux, " It's all arranged. Army and police are on the way. So are some colleagues of mine. The safe company who installed your vault are flying their best technicians into Fesses. We'll have your vault open in a couple of hours or so. I'm sorry if this inconveniences you, but it's got to be done, and you must put up with it."

He could only say, " Inconveniences me! " Then he shouted, " After this, Sir Peter Perfrement, you will kindly take your banking business elsewhere! "

I was sorry for him, but there was no time for sentiment just now, for I found myself caught in a sort of whirlpool of giddy activity. Accompanied by the usual quota of secret police from Security, four highly regarded nuclear physicists were rushed to Fesses. I was pleased to see among them my dear old enemy Frankenburg, who would have to admit that in the matter of

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fluorine he was totally confuted. There was also, of course, a swarm of policemen, both uniformed and in plainclothes, and, goodness knows why, two doctors, one of whom kept talking and talking without rhyme or reason about fluorine being found in relatively high concentration in the human embryo and how good it was for children's teeth. An expert from the quiet old days of the high-explosive blitzes said that since one invariably evacuated the area surrounding an unexploded bomb until it was defused, it would be wise to evacuate Les Sables des Fesses.

At this the mayor went into ecstasies of Gallicism. To evacuate this place at carnival weekend would be to ruin it—death rather than dishonour, and so forth. I said that if my fluorine 80+ blew, the problem of evacuation need not arise; for nobody anywhere, ever, would be any the wiser.

The chief of police, giving me a suspicious look, said that the present danger was only hypothetical; but the panic that must attend a mass alarm would be inevitably disastrous. It would be necessary only to surround the block in which the bank was situated. This being in the business district of the town, and most of the offices shut up for the weekend, the matter might be accomplished—a hairsbreadth this side of impossibility.

So said the chief of police, filling a pipe as a pioneer fills his muzzle-loader with his last hard-bitten cartridge, and pointing it right at me. He made it clear, without speaking, that he thought this was all a put-up job to get that bank vault open.

M. le Queux said, "But the armoured car has been and gone, and the bank is just about empty of cash until Monday."

Still the chief of police wasn't satisfied. Watching him tamp down the charge in his pipe, I could not help reciting a hunting proverb of my grandfather's: "Ram tight the powder, leave loose the lead, if you want to kill dead." He made a note of that. Meanwhile, Frankenburg and the others were poring over my notes, which I had been compelled to hand over.

Frankenburg growled, "I want to check, and double-check. I want a computer. I want five days."

But little Doctor Imhof said, "Come, we must grant the possibility that what we read here is valid. Even for the sake of argument we must grant it."

"Well, for the sake of argument," said Frankenburg. "So?"

"So," said Imhof, "*any* relaxation of pressure must render Perfrement's so-called fluorine 80+ harmless, must it not? This being the case, a hole drilled in the vault door should be an ample measure of precaution. This hole made, why, let the matter wait until Monday."

"So be it," said I. "He talks sense."

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So now the engineers from the safe company, having come in by plane, unloaded their massive paraphernalia in the bank. And among the cylinders and eye-shields and other gear I noticed a number of gas masks.

" What are they for? " I asked le Queux.

Frankenburg, unwilling to be convinced, was complaining, " Yes, yes, bore holes—leave Perfrement's thing until Monday. But unless I misread this formula, his so-called fluorine 80+ will by that time have ceased to exist."

A certain Dr. Chiappe said in a glum voice, " Metaphysics: If we leave it, it ceases to exist; if we don't leave it, it ceases to exist; but, as I read Perfrement's notes, if we leave fluorine 80+ we shall be involved with it in a state of co-nonexistence. Better bore holes."

I said, " I asked you, M. le Queux, what are those gas masks for? "

He said, " Why, when the door is in any way interfered with, the alarm automatically goes off. We omit no precautions, none whatsoever. As soon as the alarm goes off, the vault fills with tear gas from built-in containers."

" Did you say tear gas? " I asked.

" In a high concentration."

" Then," I cried, " get away from that door at once! " I appealed to Frankenburg. " You hate every word I say, old fellow, but you're an honest man. Conceding that my notes are right—and I swear they are—you'll see that my fluorine 80+ has one affinity. One only. That is with C_8H_7ClO—chloro-acetophenone. And that, damme, is the stuff tear gas is made of! "

Frankenburg nodded. Chiappe said, " Slice it as you like—we've had it! "

And old Raisin grumbled, " This, I believe, is what the dramatists call a perfectly damnable impasse. Correct me if I'm wrong."

It was little Imhof who asked, " Is there no part of this place at all that's not guarded by alarms, and what not? "

Le Queux said, " Technically, there is only one part of our vault that's reachable from the outside—if you can call it the outside. The back of our vault abuts on the back of the jeweller's, Monnickendam's, next door. His vault, you see, is itself two feet thick. Hence—"

" Aha! " said the chief of police.

" Get Monnickendam," said the Minister of Security, and that famous jeweller and pawnbroker was duly produced.

He said, " I'd open my vault with pleasure, but I have a partner, Warmerdam. Our vault opens by two combination locks which

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must be operated simultaneously. These locks are so placed that no one can operate both at the same time. I have my own secret combination and Warmerdam has his. We must both be present to open the vault."

"That's how one gets rich," old Raisin muttered.

Monnickendam corrected him, "That is now one *stays* rich."

"Where's Warmerdam?" they asked.

"In London."

London was telephoned, and Secret Service agents dragged poor Warmerdam shrieking from the dinner table and rushed him to a jetport and fired him over to Les Sables des Fesses with such dispatch that he arrived in a state of semiobfuscation, with a napkin still tucked under his chin.

But now, by the chief of police's expression, it was evident that the whole matter was an open-and-shut case to him. I was some sort of master criminal, a Moriarty, and my real objective was the jewellers' strongroom. He strengthened the police cordon, and Monnickendam and Warmerdam opened their vault.

The men from the safe company went to work—but not before the two jewellers had got a signed and witnessed indemnity from the president of the bank; they wouldn't trust the minister—and so, the heavy steel and concrete of the strongroom cut through, we began to bite into the back of the bank.

"Time runs out," I said.

Raisin irritated everybody by saying, "Imagination, my friends, and nothing but imagination, is making us all sweat. All things considered, do you think that a megaton, a tyrrannoton, or an ultimon could do us—us personally—more harm than, let us say, a pound of dynamite?"

The chief of police said, "Ha! You know a lot about dynamite, it seems."

"I should hope so," said Raisin. "I was sabotaging Nazis, my friend, when you were swinging a truncheon for the Deuxième Bureau."

I had better be brief, however. At about five in the morning we broke through.

I said, "Fine. You can take it easy now. Fluorine 80+ can't blow." And when I then suggested a hot cup of tea, M. le Queux tried to strangle me.

But the men worked on until the hole was about two feet in diameter; and then one of the smallest of them took my key, wriggled through, and came back with the contents of my safe-deposit box—the little paper package of fluorine 80+.

I pointed out to Frankenburg how greatly it had diminished. "By George, we had a close call then!" I said.

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And that, as you might think, was that. Ah, but you'd be wrong. For you see, in the course of that mad night, when every policeman in Les Sables des Fesses and its environs was mounting guard at the bank and at Monnickendam's, a gang of thieves broke into the Prince of Mamluk's Galleries, said to contain one of the four finest art collections in the world.

They stripped the place at their leisure. They took a priceless collection of antique jewels, three Rembrandts, four Holbeins, two Raphaels, a Titian, two El Grecos, a Vermeer, three Botticellis a Goya, and a Greuze. Greatest art burglary of all time, I'm told. They say that Lloyds would rather have lost a fleet of transatlantic liners than what they underwrote those pictures and things for.

Taking it by and large, I suppose it's for my own good that I was sh pped back to England and put under guard.

If I'd had any sense, of course, I'd have kept quiet about that confounded fluorine 80+. As it is, I've made a prisoner of myself. They regard me—of all people!—as a compulsive chatterbox. As if fluorine 80+ is anything to chatter about. Why, you could make it yourself. Take 500 grammes of fluorspar—

Oh-oh! Here come my two friends, I'm afraid. I will take my leave of you now, sir . . . Good night to you.

Good evening, gentlemen!

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"I'm waiting to show my invention for becoming invisible . . . so don't go dashing in ahead of me."

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I keep a Beau on every Boat—
My Mother did so before me

When first I chanc't to be among them
I was belov'd of divers young men;
And with a modest mild behaviour
They did intreat my love and favour.
But this I learned from my mother,
A kiss of a Sea-man's worth two of another . . .

Love's fiery beams I cannot smother,
A kiss of a Sea-man's worth two of another.
Roxburghe Ballads, 17th century

Wife in Every Port

"Yes," said Morten, "I had five wives. The Spanish are lovely women, you know, like a mosaic of jewels. One of them was a dancer, too. When she danced it was really like a swarm of butterflies whirling round, and being drawn into, the little central flame; you did not know what was up and what was down, and that seemed to me then, when I was young, a charming quality in a wife. One was an English skipper's daughter, an honest girl, and she will never have forgotten me. One was the young widow of a rich planter. She was a real lady. All her thoughts had some sort of long train trailing after them. She bore me two children. One was a Negress, and her I liked best."

"Did they go on board your ship?" Eliza asked.

"No, none of them ever came on board my ship," said Morten.

ISAK DINESEN, *Seven Gothic Tales*

Minor Quay

Love's a sad affair, my treasure,
Ah, to think that we must part!
Still, there is a sort of pleasure
In a badly broken heart;
Ere we sever, you and I,
Let's enjoy a jolly cry . . .

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When the girls of Bristol City
Smile upon you, fond and free,
Will you never think them pretty
But be wishing they were me?
Be they fond and be they fair
Will you wish that I was there?

A. P. HERBERT, *The Sailor's Lass*

Frank Speaking

He perceived a young Moorish girl, splendidly dressed, half lying on an ottoman, with her eyes fixed on the moon, whose rays enabled him to observe that she was indeed beautiful. Satisfied with what he had seen, he descended, and singing one of the airs, he then repeated the words, "Do not be afraid—I love you—I cannot speak your language."

"I know you not; who are you? you are not one of my people."

"No, but I will be anything you wish. I am a Frank, and an English officer."

CAPTAIN MARRYAT, *Mr. Midshipman Easy*

Siren Song

Oh what are they a-doing of, the Sirens on the rocks?
A-nodding and a-gossiping and knitting winter socks,
In saucy stripes and gaudy checks and polka dots and plaids,
—When not engaged in singing songs to simple sailor-lads.
Yo-ho, me lads, and so, me lads, you may bet your monthly money
It's purl and plain upon the main that keeps the Sirens sunny.

Oh what are they a-doing of, the mermaids in the grottoes?
A-giving cracker parties, and reading out the mottoes?
But no, they crochet winter vests to keep away the cold
And play upon their lutes and flutes and triangles of gold.
Yo-ho, me lads, and so, me lads, attend this wisdom weighty
It's crochet on the ocean blue that keeps the mermaids matey.

ROSIE LEE

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Silver Lined Shellback

Come my own one, come my fond one,
Come my dearest unto me.
Will you wed with a poor sailor-boy
Who has just returned from sea?
No indeed I'll have no sailor,
You are dirty, smell of tar,
You are ragged, you are saucy,
Get you gone, you Jacky-Tar!
If I'm ragged, if I'm dirty,
If maybe of tar I smell,
Yet I've silver in my pocket,
And a store of gold as well.
When she heard him thus address her
Down upon her knees she fell,
Saying, Ragged, dirty sailor-boys
I love more than words can tell.

The Saucy Sailor

Pinch of Salt

Looking up, and finding her grey eyes inquiringly and compassionately upon his face, Captain Paul laughed and ventured for the first time to kiss her, for they were standing in the dark alone. Rosamond coloured a good deal for she was not a kissing kind of girl and did not really enjoy it; it made her shy . . .

"You darling baby," said Captain Paul. "I suppose now you're offended, and will tell papa."

"No," said Rosamond. "I'm not offended. How could I be? And I shan't tell father. He wouldn't be interested. He'd only think it rather vulgar."

"Well then," said Captain Paul, "I may do it again, mayn't I?" and did it again, and Rosamond coloured still more.

"I would rather," said Rosamond politely, "it didn't happen often, if you don't mind," and he laughed again . . .

She preferred him to tell her stories of the sea.

ROSE MACAULAY, *Orphan Island*

'Tis true the Shark is not the Pink
Of nice propriety, but think!
Think of the Horrid Sailor Men
He has to swallow now and then,
With all their Untold Yarns inside
And all their Fearful Oaths beside!

OLIVER HERFORD

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DESPERATE VENTURE

BY OLAF RUHEN

MY EIGHTEENTH birthday was the most miserable of my life.

It was a day of glorious weather; that made it worse. And I was a young Australian adventure-bound, sailing tropic seas south of the Line. I was aboard the *Averill Webb*, a bucketing old barquentine that tramped the seven seas on any mission of villainy that Haley James could edge her into. James was her owner-captain: as nasty a character as I have met since, his only saving grace a bent for cleanliness, and even that disguised somewhat by an indulgence in cheap scents. He had a crew whose attributes ranged from halfwittedness to an excess of villainy rivalling his own. And I was the cabin boy, the slushy, the cook's offsider, the lad who was called upon to do every dirty job on the ship.

What's more, I had shipped in Sydney three weeks before as a paying passenger. I was more than that. My father had paid a charter fee to have the *Averill Webb* turn aside from her intended route to Hong Kong to deliver me at Shanken Island in the Calvados chain, and he'd been generous enough, I knew, to ensure a pleasant passage for me. But my occupancy of the tiny cabin astern—it was the first mate's, but neither my father nor I knew that—did not extend to the time we cleared Sydney Heads, less than an hour from casting off. I was on deck, standing by the rail, when the mate, a thin beanpole of a man named Forster, came by.

"All right, Brent," he said. "Get your duds out of that cabin and take them to the foc'sle."

I stared at him in astonishment.

"You hear me," he said. "Now move."

I stayed where I was, and without another warning he brought his fist up and slammed it into my face, punched so hard I might have gone overboard but that I was standing near the shrouds. I still had my face covered up when I heard the captain's voice.

"Is he giving trouble, Mr. Forster?"

"No trouble, Cap'n," the mate said, and he was grinning.

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"Now you, Jim Brent. Listen good," the captain said. "I keep no deadheads on this ship. You'll have to work your passage and earn your keep. You'll do what you're told and you'll do it right."

He was a tall man with a ruddy face and curling dark hair brushed into a pattern that minimised the deformity that had been caused when his right ear was slashed away by a knife. Since we had left the wharf he had added a gun-belt to his costume, and I never subsequently saw him without it. It carried a holster and a sheathed knife, both fastened tightly at his back, to the right- and left-hand sides; the cane chair he sat in through most of the voyage was cut away at the back so that he could wear these weapons there in comfort.

I opened my mouth to protest, and Forster hit me again.

"You heard me," he repeated. "Get your gear. And when I tell you something, say, 'Aye, aye, sir.'"

I said, "Aye, aye, sir," and went to the cabin for my gear. There was no point in doing anything else. And from that moment I was the lowest member of the crew—treated, I suppose, no worse than the rest of them, though it seemed bad enough, I can tell you, to a lad fresh from public school.

The most of my work I hated like the plague. I scrubbed the galley, the captain's and the mate's cabin; I fed the fowls in the cages on the deck, and cleaned them out; I learnt to holystone the decks and polish brass—and twice a week at least I burnished the Captain's bathtub, an object that evoked a great deal of low-voiced amusement in the foc'sle.

It was a big copper vessel in which the captain could, and did, sit at ease with his legs outstretched. Twice a week I struggled with it to his cabin, and ran back and forth from the galley with pots of hot water, and stood by until he had finished with it to drag it into the companionway, and empty it out and hang it on the wall of the galley, lashing it tight so that it did not mar the paintwork. It was a bath deeper than ordinary, so that the water would not slop over with the roll of the ship. That was fortunate for me; I was belted if it slopped over.

I had to keep it burnished, as I said. It soon tarnished in the sea air, but on the morning after his bath Haley James liked to see the metal blazing in the sun; and also, I soon found that it paid me to burnish it again before he used it. I had to use a kind of sloppy paste of vinegar and salt; it bit into the wounds my soft hands sustained on ship's rope and holystone, and I hated that bath as much as I have ever hated anything.

I was bruised and bitter; the lowest of the seamen treated me as an inferior and cuffed me as of habit, and I hadn't the heart or

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the stature then to fight back. But there were some compensations. I don't know why it is that men like handling sail, the stiff coarse canvas of commercial windjammers especially; but they do, and I did. I learnt to man the yards with the best of them, and I learnt, I suppose, a few other tricks of seamanship such as most men knew in those days. I had the consolation, or I thought I had, that my servitude would be short—Shanken Island and the Calvados chain would be the first stop from Australia—and when I went ashore I would be free.

Oh, and I had a vengeance planned, a dozen differing vengeances, complicated and complete, that utilised my father's influence and the integrity of port authorities. It makes me sad to think of them.

On this morning of my eighteenth birthday, when I came on deck, the ship was surrounded by islands, large and small. The *Averill Webb*, under full sail, was heading in the light airs of morning to a channel between two of them, a gap so insignificant that it was difficult to believe that she could negotiate the passage. I have been there since, and never failed to marvel that one of the world's great sea-routes penetrated a strait so narrow. Off on our starboard beam there was a space between the clustered islands; on the port bow a mountain range, jagged as the sierras and cloaked in dark forest, marched peak by peak into an ungauged distance. Behind us were other islands.

And as Shanken should have been our first landfall I turned to the nearest man—it was Hector Splint, the bosun—and I asked him, "Which one is Shanken?"

"You got me there," he said.

"But these are the Calvados chain?"

He laughed.

"This here's the China Passage, boy. You mark it well. This here's the tightest pinch in all the world's seaways."

He turned to go, but I clutched at him.

"No, wait, wait. Where does the passage lead?"

"Pretty near everywhere, boy. Hong Kong for us. Guam and China and the Indies, maybe."

"Then this is New Guinea?" I pointed to the mountain chain, and he nodded.

I had been doublecrossed. What's more, I was in some danger, but I was too inexperienced, too young, and too trusting then to think of that. The Calvados chain lay far to the south-east of New Guinea; that much I knew from poring over my school atlas before I embarked; and our heading was still a northerly one.

Without thinking I ran aft. I saw Forster coming and slipped

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his eye. I kept out of his sight, and when he was gone I ran straight to the captain's quarters. The door was half open, and he was standing before a mirror. He was waxing the ends of his moustache—he used to wax the point of his beard as well. He was something of a dandy, was Haley James.

"I didn't send for you, Brent," he said.

"No, sir. Sir, we are clearing the China Strait."

He lifted his eyebrow in a way he had.

"Trying to teach me navigation, eh?" he asked.

"Sir, Shanken Island is south-east of here."

"True," he said. "We are sailing for Hong Kong."

"I must get to Shanken, I must, I must," I said; and he laughed.

"You'll get there, sonny. Some day."

"Captain, it's urgent. There is a great deal depends on it. It must be without delay. My father paid you."

His ready hand caught me and sent me flying into the companionway. "Now you little runt," he said, "get back to work."

But I was still defiant.

"I'll report you. I'll report you to the authorities."

"A discontented cabin boy with an imagination."

I had heard enough tales in the foc'sle of earlier ventures of the *Averill Webb* to realise that I was being foolhardy. There was nothing to stop him throwing me to the sharks, for that matter. I tried another tack.

"There's much depends on it, Captain. There could be another payment, perhaps. But I have to get to Shanken quickly."

He reached through the doorway and pulled me into the cabin again. He was staring at me thoughtfully.

"You never told me your business there," he said.

That was the first time I thought I might be guilty of a very foolish indiscretion. "It's nothing. It's just a letter."

"It's important; it's nothing; it's a letter. What letter? And to whom?"

"A—letter."

"A letter too important to leave to the mail, eh?"

I said nothing.

He raised his voice and called, and in a moment a seaman appeared at the door. "Send Mr. Forster down," the captain said.

I knew what was coming. I could tell as surely as though I had some pre-vision that the secret of my mission was betrayed, and it surely was. I listened dull as a sulky lout while the captain talked to the mate.

"We seem to have overshot Shanken Island, where young

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Brent here tells me he has urgent business, Mr. Forster. Young Brent won't tell me the nature of that business; it's too important. But he has a letter, Mr. Forster, which if he gets a chance he'll undoubtedly show to the authorities in Hong Kong—if he gets to Hong Kong—in support of his absurd claim that he was shanghaied or kidnapped or something. I want that letter, Mr. Forster. It'll be in his sea-chest, like as not. And see to it that young Brent stays forward when he's not on duty. Get him out of here, Mr. Forster, and bring me the letter."

I'll say this for Forster: he was efficient. He took me forward, locked me in the brig, and left me there while he made his search. The letter was not hidden. The captain, therefore, was privy to all its contents. And Sam Murchison, who was my father's friend, was thus betrayed.

I'd first seen Sam Murchison only a couple of weeks before I sailed. He came to Sydney from Shanken Island on a mission sad enough: he was facing bankruptcy, and he was ill. Some years before, a widower with two adolescent sons and a younger daughter, he had sold all his few possessions and sailed for the then wild and unknown islands round New Guinea to become a planter. Somehow, by some accident, he had found Shanken Island and fallen in love with it, not so much for its prospective wealth as for its quiet tropic beauty. Other men had always passed it by. Its indigenous population was too small to promise returns from trading or from shell-fishing, its mountain slopes too steep for the easy establishment of a plantation.

His money went into the building of a house and a superfluous wharf; he chose to plant cotton, rather than the coconuts which offered some guarantee of a future return. Coconuts, though, took seven years to come to fruition; Murchison wanted an earlier return. His first year's crop was a failure but he planted again. After the second year he turned to tobacco. It also failed. He planted coconuts in his fourth year and held on, unable or unwilling to recognise failure, and still in love with the beauty of his island. He held on long past the point at which retreat had become essential.

Then, as he finally succumbed to the necessity for leaving his island, he was struck down by illness: a wasting of the body tissues brought on by attacks of intestinal parasites complicated by repeated bouts of malaria. His sons, men now, put him on a ship bound for Sydney where the temperate climate offered his best chance of recovery, while they themselves prepared to relinquish the plantation. He had built well and furnished well in the first place, and it was necessary to charter a ship to remove

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what they could from the island, for no buyer would ever be tempted.

Murchison at Sydney came to my father, who had been his oldest and his best friend. Along with the battered valise that held his clothes he had a sack full of pretty things he presented to my mother and my sisters: small ebony carvings, and carved pearl-shells, and black bowls cut from the hard shells of coconuts. There remained in the sack a quantity of stone, a green stone, dark in tone yet curiously bright in hue, like some of the mosses you find sometimes by paths in the wet forest.

"What's this?" my father asked.

"Just a stone. The colour fascinates me. There's much of it in the island, apparently. There's a good deal of serpentine, and this rock with it; but this isn't serpentine—not hard enough."

"Perhaps it's of value," my father said.

"Not likely," Murchison disagreed. He was pale and shaking, and my mother was fluttering about him. "Nothing good happens to me; not in a financial way, at any rate."

Malaria is a disease of hot climates, but I know from sad experience how once it has taken hold it strikes at the onset of the colder weather. In an hour or two, no more, Murchison was in bed, delirious. It was a strange delirium; he laughed softly to himself hour after hour, though judging from his physical appearance his body was tortured by the fever. My father had a friend in the assay office, and while Murchison was unconscious he took him a sample of the rock. It was garnierite, a rich ore of nickel. The deposits were worth a fortune.

And this was my most urgent mission: to halt the family's evacuation from Shanken Island; to keep them there and have them stake out their claims of the ore under the mining laws. It was all in the letter, and now it was in the knowledge of Captain Haley James.

While I sat in the ship's brig, steeped in misery, I heard the commotion on deck, and when Forster came in a little while and let me out, there was a kind of triumph in his bearing; but he ordered me to work in his usual manner. We had changed course.

We sailed that day through a sea of islands, some high and mountainous, some no more than a strip of sand, and the flying fish played about the barquentine. I worked in the sunshine under a leaden burden of despair. And towards the night we came to Shanken Island.

"There's your island," the captain said over my shoulder. "And the schooner at the wharf there—that would be your friends, I suppose, getting ready to take their leave. Ah well,

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we'll not interrupt them. A couple more days will be neither here nor there."

He walked back to the chair he occupied near the wheel.

Well, that was my eighteenth birthday, and to make it worse, if that were possible, the captain settled on it for his bathnight. Shanken was on the southern side of the line of the Calvados; beyond it we sailed under canvas much reduced towards the east. There were other islands on our port still, but an open seaway to starboard. I was exhausted from furling canvas and setting yards; the *Averill Webb* was undermanned, though crewed adequately for this fair weather; but then, when the others went to their rest, I embarked on the hated task of filling the captain's bathtub.

And my last chance was slipping away from me. There was nothing I could do about it. I could not swim a fraction of the distance to the nearest island; and besides, the seas were full of sharks, and I had a very sincere though youthful fear of the serpents I had seen in it.

But I was desperate, and when I had finished the menial work of emptying the bath and hanging it in its place on the galley wall, I did not go to my bunk in the foc'sle where the men off watch were already snoring, but instead on a mission of my own to the hold where the cargo was. I waited first for Forster to get out of my way. He was with a man sounding the well; and when he had finished I slipped down by way of the carpenter's locker. I had a plan, the craziest plan ever conceived, even by a boy at an age when boys are notoriously seized with thoughts of adventure and romance.

I worked like a mouse in the dark for an hour, and when I came on deck again I brought with me a number of things I fancied necessary: a coil of cordage and three short lengths of timber all wrapped in some canvas, and a knife stuck in my belt.

There was a man at the wheel and a man lounging in the bows forward; Forster was below somewhere, away from the night chill. When I had cleaned the bath I had made a rope fast all round its upper rim and threaded through the handles. I left an end to it about ten feet long.

I edged the bath now over to the rail and made the line fast. Then I went to the galley for the last pail of garbage, and as I emptied it over the lee rail I kicked the bath into the water at the same time, so that it towed alongside.

The man at the wheel looked up at the splash, but he saw the garbage float past on the surface and thought no more of it. There was a cloud coming up to the moon, and I waited for it;

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and as the dark fell I went over the rail and into the bath with my bundles. I nearly came to grief right then. But the bath was seaworthy. It floated under my weight. It was high out of the water and unsteady, and it was cramped enough, but it floated; and when my heart had stopped its plunging from apprehension compounded by the first effects of disequilibrium I untied the painter from the rail and delivered myself and my prospects up to chance. I lay doubled up, my face between my knees in the bottom of the bath, hoping against hope that if the bath were seen my presence in it might not be discovered.

And even if the bath were seen, I still had a gambler's chance in the dark. For it would take some time to haul the *Averill Webb* up into the wind and launch one of the boats to look for me.

But that didn't happen. I'd launched the bath from the lee side, where I tipped the garbage; and of habit the man at the wheel was watching both the weather side and the sky, so that the bath drifted away from the barquentine as unnoticed as any other flotsam.

Once I was free my troubles were only beginning. I lay cramped up in the bottom much longer than was necessary; indeed, when I looked up I could not find the barquentine at all, and did not realise that I was looking in the wrong direction, for the tub turned lazily all round the compass. When I discovered the silhouette of the ship she must have been half a mile away. There was no hue and cry, nothing at all except myself on the open water and my immediate past floating away from me.

Every time I moved, the tub lurched. I had been a fool not to have thought of some device like an outrigger. I had done a hard day's work but I was not tired; the excitement and the suspense had freshened me.

I took my poles then, and tried to rig some sort of a sail with the canvas. I did it in this way. The tub had one high end and hinged handles at both ends, in the old-fashioned form. The high end was towards my feet. I turned the handle inwards and set my longest spar—about five feet long, it was—inside the handle, and thrust it down to the bottom of the bath, where I wedged my foot against it. I tied the canvas to the other spar by the corners, and made two sheets of cord to steer it by. Then I unshipped the first spar again so that I could fasten this boom to its top. My third spar was to be a kind of steering paddle.

I turned my back upon the Southern Cross and picked out a signpost from among the stars in the sky ahead, and tried to hold my course. You cannot imagine my troubles. In my tub I swung and spun and lurched and lost control, and tied myself up with the cords.

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But gradually I overcame the difficulties, one by one. And in an hour or two, perhaps, I was headed to the north where islands must be, the cords that were the sheets lashed to my belt with slip-knots, the steering paddle in my hand, and my bare feet taking turns at wedging the base of my little mast. I was luckier than I can say in two things: the little breeze was near enough to being behind me, and the sea was as calm as a mill-pond. And before dawn I raised the outline of an island.

I never reached it though, for natives came out to me in a flotilla of canoes. They were fine, lively fellows, active and intelligent. They laughed and laughed to see the craft I sailed, but they showed concern for my welfare too. They had little English, but strangely enough we could understand each other to some extent—from reactions, as I suppose. The name Shanken Island meant nothing to them, and at that time I did not know what natives called it, but the name Murchison they recognised. They helped me aboard one of their canoes—a big, planked-up craft with gunwales two feet out of the water, and a moth-wing sail longer than the hull and sewn out of pandanus leaves. They took my copper bath in tow, and we set out once again for Shanken.

We reached it before noon that day.

Well, that was my eighteenth birthday, a day of sailing the high seas in a barquentine and a bathtub; and there wasn't much more to the story except that of course it had a happy ending: my welcome at Shanken Island.

I liked the Murchisons straight away. There was Ted, who was a man at twenty-one, and his brother Steven, a little older than myself, and there was Rosemary; and Rosemary was beautiful. They asked me so much about my bathtub that I could scarcely get to tell them of their fortune. Their house was already stripped of even such things as glass windows—precious in that day and time—and garden pots. And the boys, who had been at some pains, it appeared, to persuade their father into leaving the island, were now loath to unload the schooner again to make preparations to stay.

But Rosemary was a flame of joy.

"I'm glad," she cried. "I'm glad, glad, glad!" She loved the island; she always did, through all her life, as who could tell better than I?

"But wait a minute," Ted said, when he had heard everything I had to tell him. "We're not out of the woods yet, by a long way. There's Haley James. He could come looking for you."

"I don't think so," I objected. "As far as he's concerned, his bath and I are lost at sea."

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"Fair enough," he acknowledged. "But that's the least of it. He knows about the nickel ore; he'll be coming back for it as soon as the schooner leaves. Maybe he won't expect to find us here and the claims pegged, but if he does we could have a fight on our hands."

"Right now, he's headed for a beach somewhere," I said. "He has seven auger-holes in his bottom." I told them what I'd been doing in the hold.

"But how could you bore seven holes?" Steven asked. "I mean, with the sea coming in, and all?"

"Six marline-spikes," I told him—my, I was as proud as an unhandled colt. "I'd bore a hole, jam in a marline-spike, and bore another. Then when I bored the last hole I pulled the other spikes and left. If I'd been able to find more marline-spikes there'd have been more holes."

Well, I was a hero then, and that's the way life goes. When you come to the day of your worst despair, your greatest happiness is never far away. That's the way I've found it.

The garnierite on Shanken never came to much. There was a swift little fortune in it for a while, and then it came to an end. But by that time the coconuts were bearing, and the island survived.

The Murchison boys pulled out; but I stayed on, and so did Rosemary, and that's another story. The bath was on Shanken long enough, a kind of proof of how it all happened. Then our eldest boy went sailing in it once, out on the lagoon—he'd been hearing stories, I suppose—and he sank it in deep water. I never had the heart to punish him for it.

The *Averill Webb* and Haley James, it was just as though they sailed off into the night. I did hear a native yarn about a barquentine being patched up about that time on a beach a hundred miles away. I never knew for certain, and it all happened a long time ago.

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YEAR OF GRACE

We are the rulers, he thought.
The terrorists—the men who kill

BY BRIAN CLEEVE

HE stood for a moment by the wall, remembering. Almost a year. Almost to the day. The heavy green of a tree leaning its thick branches out over the grass margin of the road. They had parked the car in its shadow. He almost thought he could see the wheel tracks, deep in the soft earth. But summer and autumn, winter and spring again had worn them away. Other tracks had worn them away. Police cars first, whining up to the spot in a scream of sirens, a morning late. Then sightseers. Then lovers. Roberto had said it was a famous place for lovers.

"We'll leave a handbag on the seat," he'd said, thick lips drawn back in what he thought was a smile. "Then if anyone sees the car—" And he laughed, his barrel body shaking as he lifted out the explosives, the demijohns of petrol, the wiring. It had been early morning. So early the stars were still visible and the wood was a dark mass of shadow. Achmet had stood listening, snuffing the cold morning air.

"Let's get on with it," Michel had said. He stopped himself from looking over his shoulder, from moving ahead of the others into the wood, but he felt like a naked man on the road. If anyone came— But if they came, what then? What would they do? They would drive away, trembling. They might not even dare to tell the police. We are the rulers, he thought. The terrorists. The men who kill. It doesn't even matter whose side we are on, left wing, right wing, secret army, communists. Only the terror matters. To kill, to terrify, to rule by destruction.

"Sacred pig," said Roberto, "are you dreaming? Give me a hand."

He bent down obediently and lifted one of the two heavy glass jars of petrol. Achmet took the plastic and the wiring. Roberto took the other jar, carrying it so easily in his blunt, thick hands that it looked like a huge bubble, a beautiful ornament.

"We'll have breakfast when we've fixed things up," said Roberto. They crossed the wall at the broken place which Achmet had noted on his reconnaissance the previous day,

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and went into the wood. The sky was lightening, but in the wood it was darker than the sea. They stumbled through wet leaves and sodden branches, climbing the gentle rise of a ridge. The path they were making for was on the far side of the ridge, Achmet said.

A bird woke as they passed and chirped and fell asleep again. Something rustled away to their left, and Michel stopped in his tracks.

"What was that?" he whispered.

"Thirty gendarmes with an armoured car," said Roberto. "Scared?"

"Sure he's scared," said Achmet. "Why shouldn't he be?"

"I'm not," said Michel. He moved forward again, trying to probe his mind. Was he afraid?

"I wish to hell we were doing it on the road," he said. Roberto stopped, turned to face him.

"You bloody lily," he said softly. "I told Rastignac you were no suffering good when he brought you in."

"Leave him alone," said Achmet. "He's young. This is the first time."

"Listen," said Michel. "I'm here because I want to be, because I believe."

"Believe!" said Roberto. He spat on the ground between their feet. "Who cares what you believe? Belief is crap. This is what matters," and he pressed the petrol jar against his stomach, his hands splayed like fat spiders on the heavy glass. "Your guts."

He put the jar down and stepped over it until his face, the smell of his breath were close and stifling against Michel's. "Fighting matters. Dying matters. That's all. Crap on your fancy, suffering beliefs."

"Is this going to be a long conversation?" said Achmet.

"Shut up," said Roberto. He picked up the jar again and they crossed the ridge and went down towards the path. Out of their sight the edge of the sun had risen and filled the sky with mother-of-pearl and gold.

Achmet fell back beside Michel. "Don't mind him," he said. "You'll be all right."

"I'll be all right," Michel echoed him. He ran his tongue over his lips. But he was no longer sure. As he had been sure in Paris, talking to Rastignac.

"Use me," he had begged. "Christ, use me. Let me kill them. Let me pay them."

He had been passed to Rastignac by friends, and friends of friends, finding him at last in the small Café of the Three Pigs.

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A thin, gaunt, greying man, with only one hand, and one side of his face paralysed. "An old fighter," his friends had said. "Rastignac will use you." Use him against the frightful thing that was growing, that was spreading its filthy, octopus suckers through the country, murdering children in the name of patriotism, murdering the sick and the old and the helpless, the innocent, the passers-by; anyone so long as it would spread terror. Until, it hoped, the country would lie paralysed by terror, afraid to resist, to move, to speak.

He had spoken, or tried to. Writing from Africa, writing the truth. Our honour is dying, he had written, our soul is dying. But the paper hadn't printed it. Yet even so he had been marked down, and one evening they had come for him. Two men in rumpled suits, flashing police cards.

"Come with us," they had said, and he had gone, and learnt thirty seconds too late that they weren't police. Three days later a fisherman had found him lying on the water's edge beyond the fishing harbour of an Arab village, twenty miles from the city.

It had taken him a month in hospital before he could walk without crutches. And while he had lain in the narrow bed, his body healing, his mind had burned. Remembering. The private prison where they had taken him. The smell of fear, the agony that sank down sometimes into blessed, blessed pain, and then screamed up again into a fierce, scarlet agony that split the brain, burst the eyeballs against bone. The stink of blood and sweat and men fouling themselves for terror. Men strapped on the horse. Women.

There had been a girl who screamed all night. Oh Christ, how she had screamed. It didn't seem possible that anyone could live so long, and he remembered it now in the wood, in the beginnings of a summer morning, and sweated cold. She had been an Arab girl. He never knew why she was there, or what they wanted from her, or what she had looked like before they tortured her. But he had seen her body in the morning. They had dragged her out as other men were thrusting him into the room where they had killed her. Her face had been brown blood and a white scar of broken teeth.

"Ah," said Roberto. "That looks nice." He patted a last handful of leaves over the wiring. They had set the two demijohns of petrol one on either side of the path, the wires connecting them and leading up the bank to a plunger. Little packets of explosives girdled each demijohn like life-jackets. When the plunger was pressed home they would explode, and the glass jars would burst. Flaming petrol would sear anything within

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five yards to a shrivelled cinder, and slabs of broken glass would slice the cinder into quarters.

"Why not shoot him?" Michel had said.

Rastignac had rubbed his one hand down the good side of his face and grinned slowly.

"Terror," he had said. And Roberto, half hidden in the shadows of the café, had laughed like a wolf.

"Breakfast," Roberto said, and pulled out a flask of brandy from his raincoat pocket. Achmet had salami and a roll of bread. He ate it slowly, his big white teeth gnawing the roll like a bone. Roberto offered him the flask and Achmet shook his head.

"I'm driving," he said, and looked at the sky, drawing in a deep breath and sighing. "This is a good place," he said. "To think such a bastard owns it."

Count Bertrand de Greux. Section leader of the secret army in this area. At eight fifteen, if Achmet's information was correct, he would walk down this path towards his gate lodge, where his chauffeur would be waiting for him with his car.

"He likes the exercise," Achmet had said. "He walks to the gate lodge every morning."

But not tomorrow, Michel thought. This would be the last time he would walk through his park.

"Not eating?" said Roberto, his voice heavy with sarcasm. "Better have a drink." He held out the flask.

"No," said Michel.

Roberto leaned forward and gathered the front of Michel's raincoat in his hand.

"I said have a drink."

"Let me alone," said Michel softly. "I'm not afraid of you." He thought how good it would be to hit Roberto between the eyes, knock him down and shake the life out of his thick, greasy throat. He might feel human again then. Almost clean.

"So our college boy isn't scared?" said Roberto.

Achmet put his hand on Roberto's shoulder. "Rastignac chose him," he said.

"Crap on Rastignac," said Roberto. "What is this? A bloody school outing?" But he let go of Michel and took another drink himself.

These are my comrades! thought Michel miserably. Two slum murderers. A year ago they were robbing cafés. What will they be in a year's time? Chiefs of police? If we win. But we've got to win. This way? But there's no other way. He went and lay down behind a bush, closing his eyes against the bright sky. What other way was there? No other way.

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The time when a man could live for something had gone by. Now he could only kill.

He must have fallen asleep, and in his sleep he dreamed of the prison, and the girl screaming. Screaming. Her face a brown mask of blood and agony, her hands held out. To him?

"Shut up, you fool!" He woke to find Achmet kneeling above him, his hand over Michel's mouth. There was a smell of sweat and garlic from the hand, and stale tobacco.

"Did I make a noise?"

"Did he make a noise?" mimicked Roberto. "Listen, lily. See this bloody plunger? That makes the only noise we want to make this morning. Come and grab hold of it and earn your suffering keep."

"Me?" whispered Michel. He crawled forward, took the little mechanism in his hand. He swallowed and ran his tongue over his lips. "You want me to—"

"Yes," said Roberto. "You."

Achmet went over to the other side of the path, moved back a safe ten yards and lay down behind a tree. As soon as he lay still he became invisible. Roberto followed him. Somewhere far away a church bell chimed, calling a village to morning mass. Eight o'clock.

They lay in silence, waiting. All hidden. A bird sang on a tree. For two hours now birds must have been singing and he hadn't noticed them. Until all but this one fell quiet again. One bird singing. He looked at his hands. They shook a little, and he relaxed them on the mechanism. But they still shook. Though not with fear. If I died, what would it matter? If this thing killed me together with the Count? What is there to live for any more? The world is sick. All that I ever believed in took sick and died when I was still a child, before I was born. Only I didn't know it. Now I know. And if I die too I'll hear no more screaming, see no more dead women hold out their hands to me. The bird gathered all its strength and sang and sang, and then fell quiet.

Up the path a man whistled. Broke off and whistled again. A dog came loping down the path, an English greyhound. The man whistled twice and it turned its head, its tongue lolling. It had stopped exactly between the two demijohns.

When the man reaches the dog, Michel thought. A bead of sweat rolled to the corner of his mouth, filled the crease of his lips with salt. And the man rounded a corner of the path, strode forward to his appointment. A tall man, wearing a light raincoat and a soft, expensive hat. His face thoughtfully pleased with the summer morning, the wood, the dog. An intellectual's

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face, fine drawn with self-probing. How could this man be what he was? How could he?

Michel stared at him, almost willing him to turn his head, to look full face at his murderer, as if full face he must reveal his secrets, the justice of killing him. Three steps from the demi-johns, two, one. The dog sniffed at a heap of leaves, disturbed a twig, and twig and leaves fell, showed wires, the long glisten of red-coated wires and a flash of glass from one of the demi-johns.

Now! thought Michel. Before he sees! Tightening his hands pressing the plunger down, down, but not completely down. And the man saw, leapt forward like an athlete, not foolishly turning back, losing time, but forward, over the wires, in one smooth rush, the dog bounding beside him, delighted at the run.

Now, thought Michel. Now! Now! And still his hands gripped the little wood-and-metal mechanism, refusing to obey. Until with an effort that might have lifted rocks he brought both hands together, drove the plunger home. For a second the world stayed still, the man ran, the dog leapt by his side. And then the world dissolved, filled with a sheet of orange flame, with black; crashed into sound, filled with the hiss of slicing glass, fell quiet again. A leaf fell from a distant twig, neatly severed through the stem. A tree had turned black. Leaves smouldered in a circle round a patch of crimson ashes.

Far down the path the man and dog still ran. From behind a tree Roberto ran out on stump legs, levelled a long pistol, fired, missed. Michel lay where he was, stunned by the noise, the flame, as if the effort of the plunger had exhausted him, drained his mind.

Roberto came towards him, spitting blasphemy. Michel still lay. Roberto leaned over him and hit him in the kidneys with the butt of the gun. "You filthy intellectual crap," he shouted. "Didn't they teach you how to press a button in your suffering college? Get up, you swine, get up so I can kick you in the crutch."

Michel got up and Roberto pushed the gun into his stomach, spitting his words, spraying Michel's face with saliva. "You gutless rabbit. Or is it only that?" Achmet came up beside him. "What do you think, Achmet? Is he just an imbecile or was he paid for this? Is someone paying you, lily?"

Michel stepped back, looking at the gun. "I couldn't do it," he said. "That's all. Not till he ran."

"Well, I can," said Roberto. He lifted the gun. Michel watched it, watched the finger whiten on the trigger, Roberto's eyes narrow to knife-slits in the fat, sallow face.

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"No," said Achmet, and Michel ducked and ran. The bullet whipped the leaves beside him and he stumbled and half fell and ran, dodging, running desperately between trees, branches whipping across his face, tangling at his feet. A second bullet ricocheted from a tree bole, hit the back of his left knee like a hammer. He folded as if the leg was cut from under him, rolled down a slope, the stump of a bush gashing his forehead, and lay for a moment spread-eagled, staring at the limpid sky.

Behind him he heard Achmet shout, "Stop shooting, you stupid bastard," and Roberto's cursing answer.

Michel clambered to his hands and knees and saw that he had rolled into the open, beyond the edge of the wood. Ten yards from him was a summerhouse at the edge of a little lake. Beyond it a clump of laurel bushes curving for thirty yards round the far edge of the lake, towards the wood again. Beyond the laurels there were lawns, trees standing in wide pools of shadow, the outline of a mansion. Nowhere to hide. Except the obvious summerhouse.

Michel lifted himself on to his sound leg, hopped, stumbled, pitched forward, saved himself against the summerhouse, and saw the girl.

Her face white with fear against a dark cloud of hair, one hand at her mouth. A tartan rug over her knees, half hiding the wheels of her chair. He felt blood running down his leg, felt his head swimming. He let his weight carry him forward into the entrance of the little wooden house. Behind him voices called, feet thudded on turf. Had they seen him? His leg gave under him again and he knelt down and the girl stared at him, her body thin with terror, rigid in the wheelchair, her white throat working, trying to swallow, trying to breathe.

"I won't hurt you," he whispered. Behind her chair the little house was full of musty shadows, empty. He crawled into the emptiness, lay there, wanting to be sick. The light of the entrance was darkened, and the girl cried out, a little stifled cry of terror.

"Special police," said Roberto's voice. "We're looking for a terrorist—the explosion—did you see him?"

The girl said nothing. Was she pointing, nodding to where he lay? The sound of feet moving, moving away. Running heavily away on grass, fading.

"They have gone," the girl whispered. He went on lying there, feeling the agony in his left knee like a slow fire consuming it. Something warm was running down his face, into his mouth.

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He tasted it and it was salt and thick. Not sweat? He put up a hand to feel it and it was blood.

"Go away," the girl whispered. "Please, before they come back."

"In a moment," Michel said. And then, slowly, wonderingly, "Thank you." Who was she? Daughter of the man he had been meant to kill? He gripped a wheel of her chair, levered himself up until he was kneeling behind her. He could see very close to him the soft darkness of her hair, the white thinness of her cheek, and beyond that sunlight, the green gold of the park. He looked left and saw Roberto and Achmet running, peering into the laurel hedge, kicking at it.

"The noise," the girl whispered, "the bomb? Is—is my uncle dead?"

"No," said Michel. "He got away."

"Thank God," the girl whispered. She put up her hands against her face and began to cry. "Oh thank God."

Michel stared at her bent head, thinking of the explosion, of the man running, of the dog. This girl's dog? How easy to have killed them both, to have left this girl desolate. And for what? What difference would it have made? Except to set other men moving through the countryside, through a town, carrying explosives, carrying death, for revenge. Kill and kill.

He wondered stupidly why she was in a wheelchair, wanted to ask her, while his eyes and half his mind followed Achmet and Roberto, getting farther and farther off, nearer to the wood on the far side of the little lake. When they were farthest off he should move, try and get to the road, to the car. He could start it without the keys, get back to the city, to Rastignac, try and tell him what had happened. What would Rastignac say? Do? Believe him? Kill him? What did it matter?

He leaned his weight on the wheelchair, struggling to his feet, and the chair moved. The girl gasped in fear.

"Please," she begged, "please go before they come back and find you." Maybe she thought he was her uncle's friend. God knew what she thought.

"You'd better go to the house," he said. "They may come back. They aren't police, you know."

"I know," she said. She looked at him, and the half of his mind that was concerned with her saw how beautiful she was, with the thin, feverish beauty of the very ill. Eyes huge, dark violet, like shadows in the thin triangle of her face. Her thin hands wax pale, showing each vein blue under the transparent skin. She wore a gold cross at her throat, and one hand touched it as if for courage.

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"I'll go," he said. Roberto and Achmet were at the far end of the laurels, casting like squat hounds at the edge of the wood. If he doubled back he should get clear away. If he could walk. He tested his left leg. The tendons screamed in agony, but he could stand on it for a second at a time.

He looked down at her, wondering what Roberto would do when he came back. "Can you call a servant?" he said. His eyes still on the two squat silhouettes of men in the distant sunlight.

"I have no bell," she said. "I'll be all right."

He wondered why no one had come running at the sound of the explosion. Because they were afraid? Or had they not heard it from the house? Roberto and Achmet had disappeared into the far wood. He moved out from behind the chair, wanting to touch her hand for good-bye, just to touch it, because it looked so frail and gentle. But he had no right to touch it.

"Thank you," he said again, and began stumbling back the way he had come, limping, looking over his shoulder. Nothing but the sunlight on the park, the dark shape of the summerhouse, the brightness of the lake. Even the girl was hidden. He plunged into the wood, pulling himself forward by the branches of trees, hanging for a long moment on each one, resting his leg. The blood was running again from behind his knee, and he felt sick and dizzy. Maybe he could lie down for a little. Would they find him? Did it matter if they did?

I have no country any more, he thought. He remembered his father, not as a man but as a photograph, a man in uniform, who had died in the Resistance when Michel was nine years old. "Please God send my father home to us." But He hadn't. And the girl in Africa who had died after her night of screaming. Who had prayed for her? And who had listened? There is nothing to live for any more, he thought. Nothing to believe in.

He lay against the bole of a tree, staring at nothing. His head was hurting. It felt empty. When he stopped walking his head began to hurt. When he walked again his head stopped hurting and it was his knee. Like the war. War ends. Another war begins. Better dead. Dead and quiet and no more thinking. Behind him, out of sight, but high and unmistakable, the girl screamed.

He stiffened. They had come back to her. And she screamed again, a high piercing scream of agony that took him in an instant to the dark stench of the cell, the sound of the Arab girl refusing to die through the long hideous night. Scream and scream and then the long choking shudder as her lungs

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failed her and there was no more breath for screaming. He turned and began to run back, thinking of nothing, not even of the pain in his leg, not even of the pointlessness of what he was doing.

It was Roberto had her. Twisting her arm behind her shoulders, lifting, lifting her out of the wheelchair, her head hanging forward, her whole body doubled up with agony.

"Tell us, you bitch," Roberto said. "He was here; you were hiding him! Do you know him? Is he one of your filthy uncle's men?" Achmet standing back, turning his head away.

Michel came running, limping and hobbling, shouting to them to stop. Roberto straightened, slackened his grip on the girl's wrist, and she fell forward out of the chair, sprawled on the grass, thin and sobbing.

Michel stopped, knelt down beside her, almost pitched forward over her. Roberto looked down at them both, running his thick tongue over yellow teeth. He had put his gun away to handle the girl, and now he drew it again, slowly, smiling with satisfaction. He levelled it not at Michel but at the girl.

"No," said Michel. "*No!*"

"Why?" said Roberto. "Do you want a witness?"

"She won't talk," said Michel. "Leave her alone. I'll go with you—in the car—anywhere—she needn't see anything—needn't know—" He was babbling. He swallowed and wiped his hand across his face. It came away wet with sweat and blood, filthy with earth. "I'll tell her—"

He bent down over the girl, shook her gently. "I'm going away with these men. They're my friends," he said. "It was all a mistake. They're my friends. Don't worry, no one will be hurt."

She lay where she had fallen, still crying with pain and terror, and Michel stood up. "We'll go to the car," he whispered. "You can do it there." He saw the muzzle of Roberto's pistol lift, the thick mouth smile.

"All right," Roberto said. He stepped over the girl and Michel backed from him, trying to smile in gratitude, in pretence to the girl. Achmet bent down and lifted the girl in his hands like a doll, setting her in her chair. She was shivering so much that the whole chair trembled.

"Don't worry," said Achmet. "We're going now."

They walked slowly towards the wood, Michel limping, setting the slow pace, looking over his shoulder as they came behind him, close but not too close. Roberto covering him.

"It's best this way," Michel said, trying to sound convincing, talking for the sake of talking, to hear a sound, to hear them

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answer. But neither of them answered and he fell over a branch and they waited for him to get up. 'The car," he said, as if he was pleading for mercy. " In the car. On the way to Paris. She'll never know."

They came to the place in the wood where they had set their trap for the Count. The fire had died to a blackened circle.

" We'll do it here," said Roberto, "I want a body here," and Michel swung round.

" No! " he said. " The girl—"

" Then we'll go back and kill the girl." Roberto laughed. " Did you think we were going to let her go? "

Michel tried to hit him. Roberto moved back a pace and Michel fell on to his knees as if he was praying. " Why? " he said. " Why do you want to kill her? "

" I don't like witnesses," Roberto said. "And she can keep you company."

" She wouldn't harm you," Michel begged. " She's only a girl. Only a cripple."

" How sad," said Roberto.

He lifted the gun, levelled, smiled. Michel closed his eyes. The shot came flat, like the smack of hands together, and Michel stiffened, waiting for the hammer blow, and the pain. But there was nothing. Nothing at all.

He opened his eyes again, and saw Roberto standing in front of him, five yards away, his mouth open in a round o of astonishment, his levelled pistol slowly lowering, falling from his hand.

His knees bent and his body sagged, slid downwards in a heap, fell on to its face.

Michel looked at Achmet. He didn't seem to have moved. And then he saw the blackened hole in the pocket of Achmet's raincoat, and a thread of smoke from it, dissolving in the sunlight.

" You killed him? " said Michel wonderingly.

Achmet looked down at the body, touched it with his foot.

" I've been getting tired of him for a long time," he said. " I don't like men who like to kill." He looked at Michel. " We'd better be going. Can you walk some more? "

Michel got to his feet, and Achmet put an arm round him, supported him. " What are you going to do to me? " Michel said.

Achmet shrugged, stared at the trees. " Nothing," he said. " Why did you let him go? The Count? "

" I don't know," Michel said. " It just didn't seem any good."

" I know," said Achmet.

They began to walk, Achmet half carrying Michel, leaving the dead Corsican behind them. " But what is any good? " said

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Achmet, and they came to the wall and found the car, the handbag lying on the seat where Roberto had left it, a mockery of love.

And now a year later Michel leaned against the same stone wall, remembering. The same wall, same sunlight, but a different country, a different world. "We've come through," he whispered. "We've survived ourselves."

He didn't really know why he had come back, what kind of pilgrimage he was making. Except that he had to come. He crossed the wall, walked through the wood. The path seemed more overgrown than he remembered it, and he looked for the place where they had lain, where Roberto had died. But the marks of the fire had disappeared, the tree had clothed itself again. He stopped and heard birds singing, saw a blackbird. He went down the bank from the wood into the open park, saw the summerhouse. He almost expected to find her there, but it was empty, except for a garden chair where her wheelchair had been.

He stood beside it, looking at the lake, remembering. He knew now why he had come. Because this had been the turning point, from sickness and nightmare back to sanity. From death to living. So that he could work again, do what had to be done, create instead of destroy. Create so little, words, fragments of the truth. But he had learnt here that it was what he had to do. That there was nothing else.

He turned away from the lake, began to walk back to the wood, his small pilgrimage over. He had to reach Geneva by nightfall, and it was getting late. Only at the edge of the wood he turned back for a moment, and looked across the park.

As he looked he saw her come from behind the laurels. Slowly, walking with two sticks, concentrating so hard on what she was doing that she didn't see him. Step by step, so slowly that he could almost feel the pain it was costing her to walk. Step by step towards the summerhouse. He stood still, waiting, watching her. She came to the summerhouse, and leaned against the entrance for a moment. And raised her head, and saw him standing there.

They stood looking at one another for a long time before either of them spoke, before either of them moved. Then he went towards her, very slowly, as if it was she who had drawn him back to this quiet place.

"You can walk again," he said, as if they were old friends. "How glad I am. How very glad I am."

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Georges Simenon

Chief Inspector MAIGRET

in a NEW enthralling mystery next month in argosy

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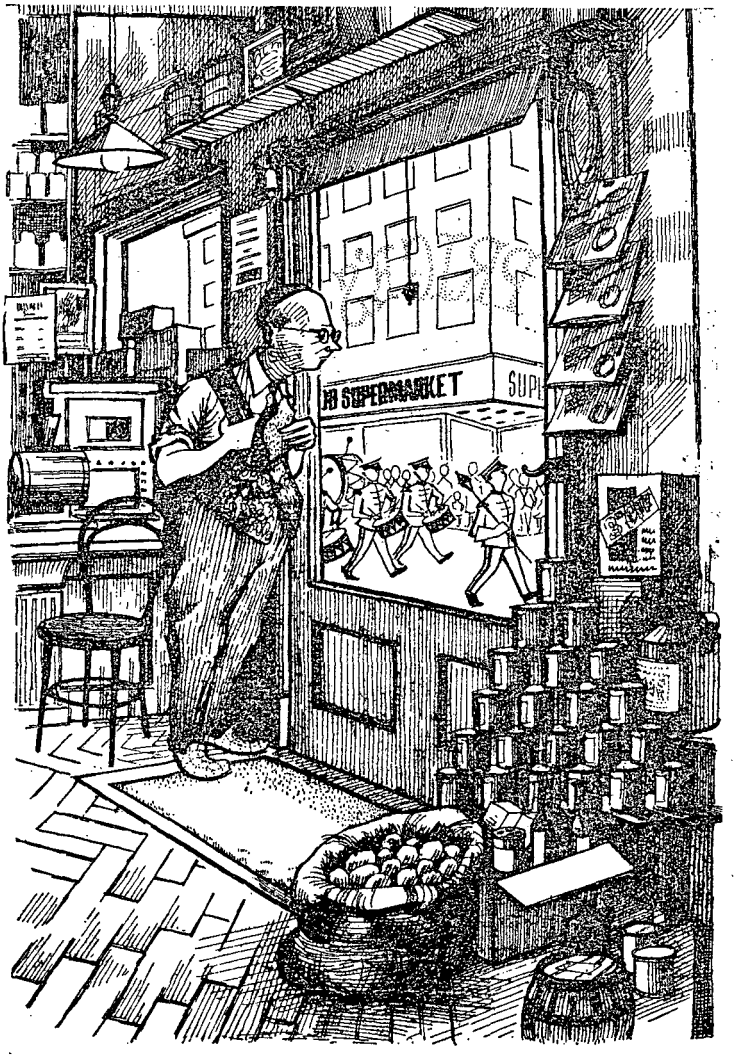
Self Service



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by E. L. Malpass

DAMN NEAR broke Price the Provisions' heart, it did, when the Supermarket came to Dinas.

For nearly half a century his dark, coffee-coloured, coffee-scented little shop had supplied the needs of the citizens. But now—in the fell clutch of circumstance, was Price. He watched with misgiving, not to say impotent despair, the inexorable march of fate on the opposite side of the road. Down came Evans the Fish and Jones the Footwear. Up went the glass-and-concrete edifice that was to be a knife aimed at Price's heart.

Yes, watched it all, did Price. The arrival of Mr. Clapham the manager, all eager efficiency and thick brown hornrims and spotless white overall. More suitable for the cast of *Your Life in Their Hands* than a Welsh grocer's, Price had thought bitterly. But already making Price, in his smoking-cap and comfortable slippers, seem to verge on the archaic. Then there was the gala opening, with the beauty queen of Dinas, lovely Gwladys Protheroe herself, being photographed from all angles, wire basket, bathing suit, and all. And a shilling off a tin of coffee; and a free packet of frozen peas to the first hundred customers; and the Dinas Town Silver Prize Band giving it old Verdi outside, and the citizens queueing since crack of dawn; and Price's Emporium as empty and forlorn as Bethel Chapel on a weekday.

Not one to take things lying down, however, that Price. He crossed the road, entered those hated portals, and demanded an Oxo cube.

Looked at him in surprise, did the assistant to whom he had addressed himself. "Not as simple as that, is it," she said. "Must keep to the routine, mustn't we, or chaos will result." She gave him a wire basket, and dispatched him along the crowded shelves.

Mr. Price found his Oxo cube, put it in his basket, made a complete circuit and came back to the counter. The young lady did some work on an adding-machine, gave him the resulting streamer of paper, Price paid, transferred his purchase to his pocket, and came away well satisfied. He went and saw his brother-in-law, Owen Porter the Bricks and Mortar.

Daggers drawn, those two had been recently, Owen having erected the Supermarket edifice, thereby acquiring, in Price's eyes, the status of snake in the grass. But the builder greeted

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his brother-in-law cordially enough. You might almost have thought he was expecting him.

" Wouldn't be an expensive job to tear out my counter and put in a few extra shelves, would it? " Price asked.

" No," said Owen. He rummaged in a drawer. " Got a few rough sketches here, as it happens." He jabbed with a forefinger. " Shelves here and here and here. Best hardwood. That's where you sit with your little adding-machine, collecting the lolly." He lay back in his chair, looked up at Price. " Do the whole thing for you for five hundred."

Price seemed to shrivel. " Five hundred what? " he asked coldly.

His brother-in-law looked at him in astonishment. " Now don't say you think that's expensive." He pointed out of the window. " You know what I charged that lot? Fifty thousand. But then, you are a relation, isn't it. Always cut prices to the bone for relations."

" Kind of you, I'm sure," Price said, very sarcastic.

" Blood is thicker than water," Owen said, his eyes misting for a second. Then, his moment of weakness over, " When do we start? "

A month later Dinas was treated to another gala opening, this time of Price's Help-Yourself Emporium; with one and twopence off a tin of coffee, and a free plastic bucket for the first two hundred customers, and the manager of the Supermarket gazing malevolently through his plate-glass and his hornrims, and pelting rain, and the Dinas Male Voice Choir All-Through-the-Nighting under the dripping shop-blind, and Miss Prudence Prynne, the Temperance Queen of Aberystwyth, being photographed from all angles, wire basket, plastic mackintosh, rain hood, and all.

And for a time it seemed as though Price's five hundred pounds had not been spent in vain. The tide that had ebbed so remorselessly began to turn. The customers came back, first in a trickle, then in a steady stream.

But things were not the same. Price was like a cat on hot bricks. A negation of all his training and way of thought, this new system was. Putting ideas into his customers' heads, that phrase, *Help Yourself*, would be, he told himself. Always assuming, of course, that the ideas were not already there. And as he sat at his adding-machine his little eyes, behind their steelrimmed glasses, darted hither and thither like terrified goldfish. Totting up the purchases of the simple people of Dinas, he was tormented by the thought of what those same simple people might have failed to declare.

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" Turn out your pockets, good boy," he longed to say. Or, " What is that unseemly bulge in your apron, Mrs. Thomas? " And when his lady customers began, one and all, to wear the outmoded muff, he could stand the strain no longer. He went off his food. He could not sleep; or if he did, he would wake screaming from a nightmare in which his customers passed before his eyes laden with loot from his denuded shelves.

He went to see his doctor.

" 'Tis those old nerves," said the doctor. " Jingling and jangling like the wires of a grand piano dropped from a fourth storey-window. Something on your mind, is it? "

" Yes," said Price.

" Then get it off," said the doctor.

Back to the Bricks and Mortar went Price. " How much to put back my counter? " he asked unhappily.

" Can't do that, good boy. Sold it to the Dinas Arms. Had to do something to recoup my losses on that operation, didn't I." Looked helpful, he did. " Tell you what. As you are a relation I will put you up a nice counter, best deal, for a hundred pounds."

Price sat down. Broken, he looked. He pushed things around on Mr. Porter's desk. " It's no good, Owen," he said piteously. " I *cannot* have them rampaging all over my shop."

Very understanding, Owen looked. " Always knew it was a mistake," he said, " taking out the counter. Fighting them with their own weapons, see."

For a second Price showed a little spirit. " Couldn't have mentioned that before embarking on a scheme that was to cost me five hundred pounds, I suppose? " he asked bitterly. " Six hundred," he corrected himself.

Unabashed, that Owen Porter. " Only a builder, me," he said humbly. " Just have to carry out the customers' orders."

Price's shoulders slumped. He said, " What am I to do, Owen? Staring me in the face, ruin is."

Oh, very distressing it is to see your own brother-in-law staring ruin in the face; especially when he still owes you five hundred pounds. Put his thinking-cap on, did Owen. Then he pulled his chair up to Mr. Price's. " All," he said conspiratorially, " may not yet be lost."

It was shortly after this interview that life for the manager of the Supermarket began to be plain hell.

Blood, as Owen had observed, is thicker than water. And one of the advantages of being an old-established grocer in a place like Dinas is that you will be related to a good half of the citizens. And though they may hate the sight of you in normal circumstances, in times of stress they will be behind you to a man.

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As Mr. Clapham, the Supermarket manager, found to his cost . . .

Got a cold in the head, Mr. Clapham did. So off to Dr. Williams' surgery, very sorry for himself.

Jam-packed the waiting-room was, with Mr. Clapham number twenty-seven in order of precedence. Be here all night, he told himself glumly. But one by one those in front of him were summoned. He was next now, waiting like a tensed runner for the starting signal. Then, oh, what a commotion. The door is barged open, in stagger four men carrying a stretcher case, groaning horrible, followed by a Greek chorus of women. The bearers proceed through the waiting-room into the passage that leads to the doctor's room. The Greek chorus settle themselves on the benches, wringing their hands. The rest view them with ill-concealed interest, agog one and all.

" An emergency, is it? " asks Mrs. Roberts Mon Repos, never one to miss anything for want of asking.

" Yes, indeed." No stopping them, now. Mrs. Roberts' query had opened the floodgates. Lloyd the Haberdashery had come home, eaten one of those frozen meat pies for his tea, and been seized immediately with abdominal pains, very excruciating.

" Food poisoning, sure as eggs, by the sound of it," diagnosed Mrs. Roberts Mon Repos. " Very dangerous, that can be."

Dangerous? Lloyd, according to the Greek chorus, was already at death's door. And it was quite likely to be opened for him, provided only that he'd got the strength to make himself heard.

And then someone asked what was, for Mr. Clapham, the sixty-four thousand dollar question. " Where did you buy the meat pie, Mrs. Lloyd? "

" At the Supermarket," said Mrs. Lloyd.

Pulled his coat collar about his ears, did Mr. Clapham, and gazed at the floor, while the chorus of vituperation was taken up. But so far, it seemed, no one had recognised him without his white overall. And then the doctor's bell rang. He rose. Hiding his face behind his handkerchief, he hurried into the consulting-room, his mind a prey to post mortems, heavy damages, and curtains for Mr. Clapham.

Dr. Williams looked at him without much interest. " What's wrong with you? "

" You tell me," said Mr. Clapham, who thought the medical profession overpaid, and didn't believe in doing their work for them.

" Right. If that's the way you want it," said Dr. Williams, who was not one to be trifled with. " Take your clothes off and lie down on that couch."

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Mr. Clapham did so. The doctor peered into his eyes, felt his pulse, prodded him, and tapped him all over with a little hammer as though he were a xylophone. " You've got a cold," he said at last. " And a damn sight worse it will be now, lying there for twenty minutes with nothing on," he added with relish. He wrote out a prescription.

Mr. Clapham got dressed. While he had lain on the couch his imagination had presented him with a picture of himself and the Supermarket firm being charged with manslaughter. " That chap on the stretcher," he said. " Will he—er—recover? "

Looked at him sharpish, did Dr. Williams. " What chap on what stretcher? "

" He was the patient before me," said Mr. Clapham.

Dr. Williams finished writing out the prescription. " I have had no stretcher cases tonight," he said firmly.

Mr. Clapham was tying his tie. In his astonishment he almost pulled it too tight. " But they carried him through the waiting-room. I saw them." He had an idea. " Your partner must have attended him."

" I haven't got a partner," said Dr. Williams, ringing his bell for the next patient.

Nonplussed, Mr. Clapham was. Thoughtfully he left the consulting-room, turned left and out at the back door. The next morning he put a new notice in his window.

FROZEN MEAT PIES DRASTICALLY REDUCED.
ONLY 1/6 SAVE 9d. BUY NOW

But no one bought, now or at any other time. Very efficient, as a means of communication, they say those old African tom-toms are. But not a patch on the Dinas grapevine, if you ask me.

Mr. Clapham sat in his inner office, nursing his cold. A tap on the door. Clapham looked up guiltily, half expecting a policeman. But it was only one of the assistants. " A Mrs. Llewellyn-Pugh asking to see you, sir, steamed up proper."

He blew his nose, sighed, and came out into the crowded Supermarket. But there was no doubt about which was Mrs. Llewellyn-Pugh. Towered over the unfortunate Mr. Clapham, she did. " You the manager? " she barked.

" Yes," said Mr. Clapham, wishing he wasn't.

" Then look what I found in one of your tins of beans."

The happy clatter of foodstuffs being garnered into wire baskets was silent. The adding-machine had ceased to click. Even the tinned music was holding its breath. Mrs. Llewellyn-Pugh had got her audience. Had she been on the stage of the

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Dinas Palace of Varieties, about to saw a lady in half, they could not have given her more undivided attention.

Mrs. Llewellyn-Pugh held up her handbag for all to see. She opened it. She began to pull. Out came, to Mr. Clapham's horrified, and to everyone else's delighted gaze, about a yard and a half of bloodstained bandage. "And what," asked Mrs. Llewellyn-Pugh, "have you to say to that?"

Mr. Clapham wished he knew. All about him were cries of disgust, astonishment, or plain enjoyment. Like being at a horror film, it was. But Mr. Clapham remained pale and silent. At last: "There must be some mistake," he gasped.

"Calling me a liar, is it?" demanded Mrs. Llewellyn-Pugh.

"No, no, madam. No, of course not. But—if you will let me have the tin back I will telephone the manufacturers immediately. In the meantime—he dived at a shelf—"let me give you another tin. A *large* size." Imploringly he pushed the tin at her. But recoiled from it, Mrs. Llewellyn-Pugh did. Gone off tinned beans, she had, judging by the look on her face . . .

SPECIAL HALF PRICE OFFER. TINNED BEANS

said the notice in the Supermarket window the following day. But there were no takers. Mr. Clapham began to think that he and his family would be living on meat pie and tinned beans for many years to come.

Very dejected, Mr. C. became. Life had taught him that these things usually come in threes. Even he, however, could scarcely have expected the pandemonium that was unleashed on the following Friday afternoon.

Very busy, the Supermarket was. Half the housewives of Dinas seemed to be in his shop, eagerly choosing their weekend food, talking nineteen to the dozen, a cheerful, bustling scene. And then, suddenly, a frantic, terrified scream that cut through the pleasant hubbub like a knife through butter. A moment of stunned silence. Then—panic stations.

Out of his office like a shot from a gun came Clapham. And oh, what a sight met his eyes. Little Miss Jenkyns having shrieking hysterics in the middle of the shop, her beret rakishly over one eye, her sensible shoes drumming horribly on the floor.

Slowly Mr. Clapham pieced the story together. Little Miss Jenkyns always had a nice tin of pineapple for her tea on Fridays. One of her little treats it was. So she went to the Supermarket and lifted a tin from the shelf. And there, peering through the space left by the tin, she saw a tiny whiskered face. She saw two boot-button eyes. She caught the flick of a long, gristly tail . . . She let out a scream that could have been heard on Dinas mountain.

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If Miss Jenkyns had pulled aside a branch in the Malayan jungle and seen little yellow faces peering at her, she could not have been more terrified. Mice, to Miss Jenkyns, were the dreaded end. She always imagined that one day a mouse would run up her leg and then she would die of stark horror. But worse was to come. Suddenly there were mice everywhere, scuttling about the floor, blandly smoothing their whiskers on the shelves, playing hell with the cheese counter. And if you can imagine a herd of panic-stricken buffalo carrying wire baskets, charging through the undergrowth, that is how the housewives of Dinas left the Supermarket; never, they were vowing, to return.

Behind the hornrimmed glasses, Mr. Clapham's eyes gleamed with a cold fury. Fate, he knew, could deal some hard blows. But even Fate didn't keep on all the time. No. An enemy hath done this, he thought. And when, having laid a dozen traps, he found that the offending rodents were of the white or domestic variety, his suspicions were confirmed. Off he went in a blazing fury to the shop of Prosser the Dear Dumb Friends.

Greeted him very courteous, did Prosser. "Well now, what is the trouble, Mr. Clapham? The pussy out of sorts, is it? The budgie sitting moody, refusing to chirrup?" He stood washing his hands, very ingratiating.

Cut no ice with Mr. Clapham. He glanced round at the assembled animal lovers. "I want to see you in private," he said.

"Of course." Prosser bowed Mr. Clapham into the office. "A matter of some delicacy concerning your spaniel Flossie, maybe?"

"No," said Clapham. "A matter of some delicacy concerning white mice."

Did those bland, friendly eyes flicker for one second? Clapham wasn't sure. But he didn't give his man time to recover. "Have you sold many white mice recently, Prosser?"

Affronted, the Dear Dumb Friends looked. "Sold two to Willie Edwards yesterday," he said sulkily. "But really, Mr. Clapham, I don't see—"

"I'm not talking about two to Willie Edwards. I'm talking about several dozen."

"Oh no, Mr. Clapham. One does not sell white mice in dozens. They are not tins of beans, you know." He tittered genteelly.

He did not titter long. A red rag to a bull, any mention of tinned beans was to Mr. Clapham nowadays. Mr. Clapham so far forgot himself as to seize Mr. Prosser by the lapels. "Come on, Prosser. Who did you sell six dozen white mice to?"

Prosser the Dear Dumb Friends gave a little squeal of fear.

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Clapham let him go. Prosser dusted his lapels. Both men were breathing heavily. Glared, they did. "So you won't talk," Clapham said at last.

"Nothing to talk about, is there."

"We'll soon see about that. The police may have other views."

But for all his bluster Clapham was beginning to feel that sense of helpless frustration that is apt to afflict the Englishman in Wales. He looked round the untidy, homely little office in the desperate hope that some clue might present itself. An invoice for six dozen white mice, for instance? But no. His eyes strayed to a photograph above the desk. A yellowing family group by the look of it. He glanced at it idly. Prosser, nursing a doggy friend, sat smugly on the front row. And so did someone else. Looking less like an ageing ferret and more like a satisfied young fox, a sprucer, trimmer Price the Provisions gazed out on posterity.

"Aaah," said Mr. Clapham. He turned back to Prosser. "Isn't that Mr. Price?"

Prosser went and peered. "Very like him, isn't it," he said uncomfortably.

"So he's a relation of yours, is he?"

"I believe there is a connection. Very distant, of course."

Once again Clapham grabbed him by the lapels. "What relation is he to you?"

"Uncle," said Mr. Prosser, licking his lips.

"Hm." Mr. Clapham went back to the picture. "Good lord, there's Mrs. Llewellyn-Pugh."

"My auntie," volunteered the unhappy Prosser, knowing that all was lost.

"And Mr. Lloyd the Haberdasher."

"Cousin, twice removed."

"I see," Clapham said coldly. "Just one big, happy family. That is all I want to know."

He went home and cogitated. He saw the whole plot quite clearly now. Those four men must have carried Lloyd through the doctor's waiting-room, straight along the passage, and out at the back door. As for Mrs. Llewellyn-Pugh and the mice! His honest, straightforward English soul could scarcely comprehend such a web of intrigue. Appalled and horrified, he was.

Overcoming his distaste, he went and saw Lloyd the Haberdashery. "Feeling better?" he asked, nasty.

"Right as rain now, thank you," said Lloyd.

Clapham gave him a look. Very vindictive. "For a man who was recently at death's door, you look remarkably fit," he said.

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Mr. Lloyd agreed warmly. " Wonderful what the medical profession can do nowadays," he said.

" Wonderful what the legal profession can do, too," said Mr. Clapham. " They can issue writs for slander, Mr. Lloyd. And in the next few days they're going to issue several. You're going to get one of them."

Very uncomfortable, Mr. Lloyd looked. " Not thinking of going to Lawyer Johns, I trust? " he said hesitantly.

" What the devil's that got to do with you? " But Clapham was shaken. There was only one solicitor in Dinas. If there was anything wrong he ought to know of it. " Why, what's wrong with Mr. Johns? " he asked.

" Oh, nothing wrong. Nothing wrong at all. But—well, he is my nephew, see, and putting him in a very difficult position you would be if—"

But Clapham had left the shop. He was developing an almost nightmare sense of impotence. But he was going to see Mrs. Llewellyn-Pugh and frighten the life out of her even if it turned out that she was the daughter of the Lord Chief Justice.

On the way he passed the Supermarket and peered in the door. Empty. His heart sank. But then an assistant was beckoning him. " Mr. Clapham. Mr. Clapham. Head Office have been on the phone, very urgent."

He went inside and telephoned Head Office. " Mr. Clapham," said a silky voice, " have you seen this week's *Dinas Advertiser*? "

" N-not yet, sir."

" Then it's time you had, Mr. Clapham. Pray read it. You will find it full of interest. Oh, and when you have read it, please come up to London. We wish to have a little chat with you about your future."

Mr. Clapham read it.

PIED PIPER WANTED IN DINAS SUPERMARKET

announced the front page. The subsequent paragraphs, Mr. Clapham felt, were guilty of the worst excesses of facetious journalism. Dispiritedly, he picked up the timetable, and began to look up the trains to London.

Mr. Price, his smoking-cap on his head, his slippers on his feet, stood behind a four foot wide counter. Behind him were his provisions. In front of him, at a safe distance, were his customers. He had restored the status quo. Anyone wanting to buy anything would ask Price for it and put his money on the counter, all square and above board. He sighed with contentment. True, he hadn't as many customers as in the old days. But at least he could be sure that they paid for what they had.

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The door opened. The little bell danced on its spring. Owen Porter came in. " The old nerves settling down again, is it? "

" Yes, indeed. No longer a prey to anarchy and confusion, I am."

Mr. Porter leaned comfortably on the counter. " Be paying me my six hundred soon, is it? " he asked.

Looked at him bewildered, did Mr. Price. " Pay you six hundred, Owen? Why, whatever for? " Then his face broke into a smile. " Oh, there is joking you are. And me taking you serious."

Very nasty, Owen was looking. " You're not going to deny you owe me six hundred pounds for taking out and then replacing your counter? "

Mr. Price was not laughing now, either. " Well, what a suggestion. Whatever should I do a thing like that for? Look at my shop. Just as it has always been, isn't it."

Owen said, " You won't get away with this, Price. I've got witnesses."

" Be difficult to prove, though, wouldn't it," said Mr. Price.

Banged the counter, did Owen. " I've got worksheets, records. The courts would soon—"

Tut-tutted, did Price. " Very expensive, litigation is nowadays," he said sympathetically.

" Well damn it, what about the joiner who did the work? Young Dewi Evans. I suppose you wouldn't suggest he wasn't a witness? "

"A good boy, Dewi," Price said thoughtfully. " My sister's son. Almost brought him up, I did, when his poor father died. Wouldn't get him perjuring himself against his old uncle, I am thinking."

At a loss for once, Owen Porter seemed. Mr. Price went on, tactfully changing an unpleasant subject, " Got a new manager across the road, I see. Sorry about that Mr. Clapham. A nice fellow. Wonder what went wrong? "

Mr. Porter was still speechless. Price went on, talking almost to himself, " Got a strange feeling, I have, that this new manager may not be staying long, either." He sighed, set his smoking-cap more firmly on his head. " Unequal to the cut and thrust of healthy competition, some of these young men," he said sympathetically.

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COUNTER ATTACK

No Englishman is ever fairly beaten.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

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NO PLACE TO RUN

He saw again the dull red bruise,
and felt an anger, sudden and violent

BY JAN COX SPEAS

JOHN STACEY stood on the highway and surveyed his domain, feeling somewhat less than a king.

He found it hard to pull himself away. There was a deadly fascination in being able to stand in one spot and watch his land disappear before his eyes. Several hundred acres of the best he had, as a matter of fact, slowly shrinking to a small patch on the rise where the house stood. The best crop the place had yielded in years, every precious foot of it stretched out on the bottom of the river.

Stacey no longer felt incredulous or stunned or even angry. It was a tragedy or an incredibly bad joke, depending on your turn of mind, but he didn't care about any of it. He was quitting, pulling out for good. It was the last time he would do battle with the river.

Thinking about the bad luck that had plagued him over the years, Stacey was mildly surprised at himself for not giving up sooner. One time it was not enough rain, too much drought and wind, too many acres of dry topsoil blowing off to Kansas and points south. Then, with irritating perversity, it was days and weeks of heavy rain, and what was left of his land floated off down the Big Muddy. You called yourself a farmer and you got used to living on credit, but no man could laugh at the same bad joke year after year.

He turned abruptly and started for the house, a sunburnt young man with grey eyes, narrowed now against the rain, and shoulders broad enough to carry his height and the challenging set of his chin. Plodding through brown water from the culvert under the road, he indulged in a moment of faint stubbornness, all that remained of the angry resentment he had felt earlier in the day.

The highway ran before the house like a narrow dike, but the water had seeped over it in a dozen low places. If the river went over its banks at the bridge, less than a mile away, the house would need more than a roadway for protection.

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He was a fool to hope that he could save it, but he knew he would keep on trying. The barn and sheds didn't matter, but his mother had been proud of the square, uncompromising white house in its grove of cottonwoods. She was no longer alive to care, and Stacey was through with it now. The river might take it, despite all he could do, but he didn't intend to abandon it to the Big Muddy without a struggle.

He left the water and strode up the incline to the house, cursing the slow rain that had fallen steadily for almost a week. Ashton, across the river, was being evacuated, and it was futile to hope the sodden land on this side would fare better.

Rounding the corner of the house, Stacey saw the boy first. The surprise of finding anyone on his back steps stopped him for a minute, so that he didn't notice the girl until she moved away from the door.

"I knocked," she said hesitantly. "You didn't answer."

"I wasn't there," Stacey pointed out. "Looking for somebody?"

"We'd like to dry off," the boy said.

Stacey looked them over. They were young, both of them, with the same dark hair and eyes. The girl was a little older, maybe twenty, but with her wet hair close to her head and her face scrubbed as clean as the boy's, it was hard to tell.

"We didn't think you'd mind," she said. "We only wanted to get out of the rain for a few minutes."

Stacey didn't mind. They were soaked to the skin and on the edge of shivering with chill. And shelter, here on the plains, was something a man offered instinctively, whether or not he was feeling hospitable.

"We're just passing through," the boy said. "Is the bridge still open?"

Stacey said, "At the moment, yes," and walked to the back door. "Come on in and dry off."

They followed him silently. He hung his coat and hat on a nail behind the kitchen door and went to a cupboard for cups; they stood watching him, their coats dripping little runnels of water on the floor, as he busied himself making fresh coffee.

"Better drink it while it's hot," he suggested. He wondered if they were as scared as they looked. Just passing through, the kid had said, but he had been on the road for the past thirty minutes and hadn't seen them. They must have come across the muddy fields behind the house, an unusual route in the best of weather.

"My van's parked up on the road," he said. "I'll give you a lift back to town."

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The boy's head jerked up. "I thought you said the bridge was open."

"Nothing but water on the other side. You wouldn't get beyond Ashton." Stacey looked at the girl's thin young face, the anxious eyes, the bruise, too recent to have darkened, staining the fragile skin along her cheekbone. "Better get back to town and find a place to stay."

"Thanks," the boy said finally, "but we aren't going in that direction."

Stacey shrugged. You didn't fool around with the river. There was only one direction, and that was up. Up, as high as you could get, and sometimes that wasn't quite high enough.

He went to the telephone and got through to the sheriff's office in town. McNalty answered, as he had been answering for the past twenty odd hours. "Stace, I've been meaning to call you."

"How does it look?"

"Not so good. The crest will be higher than we expected and those dikes out your way have taken enough."

"How long?"

"They may hold, Stace. We won't know until morning."

"Need any help in town?"

"All we can get. Stace, I'm looking for a couple of kids. If you see anybody on the run down your way, let me know."

Stacey turned and looked at the girl. She put down her cup slowly as if it had grown too heavy to hold.

"Sure," he said to McNalty. "What's up?"

"A warrant for assault. Some youngster and his sister got into trouble with a fellow named George Nixon from out west of the town."

The girl seemed to have stopped breathing altogether; the boy stood motionless by the stove, hands clenched in his pockets.

"What happened, Mac?"

"Nixon's their stepfather. Way he tells it, the kid's vicious. He lit into Nixon this morning, then stole his money and took off with the girl. They may be heading for the bridge over to Ashton, so keep an eye out for them. I'd look myself, but I've got my hands full."

Stacey said, "I'll check with you later," and hung up.

The girl pretended she hadn't been listening, but the blood had drained from her face, leaving it very pale and tired, and she couldn't do anything about her mouth trembling against the rim of the cup.

Stacey reached for his coat. "Time to get to work. Make yourselves at home."

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The boy stared at Stacey. Finally he said tightly, "Need any help?"

The girl didn't speak; she looked from the man to her brother, then back again.

Stacey wanted to grin. They didn't trust him, but they didn't know what to do about it. Then he looked at the boy's face again and didn't feel like grinning, after all. What the hell, he thought angrily. Mac could worry about George Nixon and his warrants.

"Sure," he said. "I don't know if I can save the house, but I'm going to try. It's slow work alone."

He shrugged into his coat and walked to the door. Turning, making his voice casual, he said, "By the way, I'm John Stacey." He put out his hand, and after a brief hesitation the boy took it.

"Dan Moore," he said. "This is my sister Sara."

They moved out into the slow drizzle. "I brought a load of sandbags from town," Stacey said, "but it's only a start. We'll have to fill our own. The soil is soaking wet, but we'd have to go to Arizona for dry sand." He smiled, remembering the fight he'd had for the empty bags. "Sort of in demand right now."

The boy was looking around him at the brown muddy expanse of water covering the fields and creeping relentlessly towards the house. "You're wasting your time," he said bluntly.

"Maybe," Stacey said. "Then again, maybe not."

The boy looked at him oddly. "Your crop's already gone. Why all the sweat over a house?"

Stacey shrugged. "Just habit, I guess."

"A man's a fool to keep on farming round here," the boy said. "Borrow and beg, scrabble in the dirt for every cent, then lose everything overnight. There's bound to be an easier way to make money."

Stacey heard the echoes of his own bitterness with faint amusement. "There's always an easier way to do anything," he said mildly, "if that's what you're looking for."

But not, he thought, an easy way to fill sandbags. It was slow, irritating work, but they kept at it steadily through the afternoon. The kids filled the bags and Stacey heaved them into place against the foundation of the house; he knew the bags would be worthless if the river reached the house with any force behind it, but doing anything was better than walking out and leaving the place without a backward look.

The sense of depression was back, settling in him like a persistent ache. It didn't help to remind himself that he was getting out from under at last, leaving his land to any diehard who wanted to break his back over it.

Throwing another bag in place, he decided abruptly that it

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was time to quit. He walked to the porch, motioning to the kids; they straightened up wearily, and he wished he had refused their offer of help. They were tired, and the house meant nothing to them.

He was at the stove when they came in to wash at the sink. The girl came to stand beside him, her dark hair brushing his shoulder, and she smelled clean and wet, a little like his mother's lilacs with the rain on them. "I can do that," she said quietly.

"You can sit down," Stacey ordered. "Both of you."

They obeyed wordlessly, as if it no longer mattered. Stacey went through his unhurried preparations for the meal, aware of the silence behind him, the exhaustion and uneasiness touching them. "Better fill up," he said. "May be a long time between meals."

They ate ravenously. Stacey kept his eyes away from the boy's thin shoulders under the faded shirt, the girl's white face and uncertain mouth.

"Did you say you were planning to go into Ashton tonight?"

Dan Moore looked up. "Why?"

"You'll be sent back the way you came, across the bridge. They've got plenty of water over there, and more to come."

A small sigh escaped the girl. There was no other sound in the room.

"You could stay here," Stacey went on, "and take your chance. But it's likely to be just as bad on this side of the river." He stood up. "If you decide to go back to town, you can ride in with me."

Dan's voice was thin with distrust. "We don't aim to go any place with you, mister."

Stacey let his steady gaze rest on the boy's face. "Just don't forget," he said, "you're responsible for somebody beside yourself."

He had started for the door to the bedroom, knowing he must strip the lower floor before he left, when he heard the footsteps on the porch.

Dan was on his feet instantly, his body tensed. But it was the girl Stacey looked at, and he knew she had reached the end. "Get in the bedroom," he said softly. When she didn't move, he reached across the table and lifted her to her feet, seeing something come back to life in her face at his touch. "Don't close the door. Just keep out of the light."

When he opened the door, the kitchen was empty behind him.

"Mac," he said, unsurprised. "What brings you round?"

McNalty shook his coat free of rain before he entered. He

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was a thin dark man with a stubble of beard on his face and tired lines etched round his eyes; the badge pinned to his wet uniform caught the light and glittered as he moved.

"Better get out, Stace. I've been checking the bridge."

"Anybody left over in Ashton?"

"A few stiffnecks. You know how it is, evacuating. I finally had to close the bridge."

"Thanks for the word."

"Want a lift into town?"

"I left my van up on the road," Stacey said easily. "I'll follow you in."

Mac gave the kitchen a brief scrutiny, his eyes pausing at the table with its supper dishes. "Company, Stace?"

"You might call it that."

"Anybody I know?"

Stacey grinned. "You've got a lot of enemies, Mac. I didn't bother to ask."

Mac took a damp packet of cigarettes from his pocket and studied it for a moment, then sighed and shook his head. "I don't make the laws, Stace."

"And I don't break them," Stacey said mildly, "as a general rule." He opened the door. "See you in town, Mac."

After a moment McNalty put the cigarettes back in his pocket. "Don't wait too long. It's going to be pretty wet out here."

When he could no longer see Mac's torch moving at a wide angle towards the road, Stacey crossed to the bedroom. He switched on the light, seeing the kids move in the unexpected glare as if coming out of a trance.

"Did you hear him?" he asked, and knew from their faces that they had heard and understood. It was useless to keep running, because there was no place to run. The Big Muddy had trapped them, and they must be tasting the same defeat he had known.

"He knew we were here," Dan said flatly.

"Sure," Stacey answered. He smiled at Sara, wishing he could erase the despair and hopelessness from her face. "We haven't much time. I'll be ready as soon as I've moved some of this furniture upstairs."

Dan held his arm. "Why didn't he do something about it?"

"Maybe he figures you'll be coming in with me."

Dan's eyes narrowed, but not before Stacey had seen the hot flash of anger in them. "He can think again. I said we weren't going in with you."

"Afraid of the warrant?" The boy made a small impatient gesture, and Stacey added, "Mac'll give you a break if he can."

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The girl took a deep breath. "So you've known about us all along."

Dan ignored her. "I'm not going back to George Nixon's, and neither is Sara. He had the beating due to him, and I had the money due to me. I've worked on his farm like a hired hand, and he's never paid me a cent."

"He's your stepfather," Stacey said slowly.

"He's no kin of mine," Dan said. "My ma died two years ago and then he married some other woman. He treats her like he did my ma, but this time he's got a surprise coming. She's too mean to die."

The words hung in the silence, cold and unadorned.

Stacey brought his mind back to the house, the things yet to be done, the brown water rising outside. "Sara, take the torch and stand on the front steps. Call me if the water reaches the lilac bushes east of the house." He smiled ruefully. "My mother thought a lot of those lilacs. Even won a prize with them once."

Unexpectedly, she smiled back at him. "Too bad you can't take them upstairs, too," she said, and some of the strain had left her eyes.

Stacey went to the bed and lifted the mattress, and after a long pause the boy followed him. They worked quickly, taking everything that could be lifted to the upper floor. They were struggling with the heavy kitchen stove when Sara came in from the porch. "It's above the lilacs," she said. "Between the house and the road."

Stacey looked at the boy. "Made up your mind?"

Dan said nothing. He looked at Sara, then took her hand. Without embarrassment, not softening the hard set of his mouth, but simply as if he wanted to reassure her in some way.

"We'd better go with him," she said softly. "Back to town."

For the moment they were oblivious of Stacey watching them. "I'm sorry, Sara," Dan said awkwardly. "I promised Ma I'd take care of you, but I haven't done a very good job so far." The words came in uneven little jerks. "O.K., we'll go back to town. But not to Nixon's place. I don't mind a licking for myself, but I'm not going to stand by and see anybody get tough with you. Not any old woman, and not George Nixon."

Stacey moved quickly. They had wasted enough time. He found a worn jacket for himself and a mackintosh for the boy, giving Sara the warm coat he had been wearing all day. He thought she would protest, but he gave her no time to speak. "Stick together," he said, "and stay close behind me. I'll go ahead with the light."

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The rain was heavier, driven before a cold wind, as they moved away from the house. The night enveloped them, and small wet sounds, deceptively pleasant, were all that could be detected of the river.

The river was there in the darkness, ruthless, powerful, inexorable. No longer a sullen brown lake but possessed of a life of its own; it reached for Stacey's boots, covered them, crept towards his knees.

He cut sharply to his left, keeping parallel to the road as Mac had done, and glanced back. The girl had removed the coat and was carrying it over her shoulder, but she was moving too slowly and the boy had dropped back to hold her arm.

Stacey waited until they had caught up with him again and handed the torch to the boy. "It'll begin to slope towards the road after another fifty feet," he said. "Watch your footing. We don't want to lose the light."

He had her in his arms then, without effort, and grinned in the darkness when she refused to relax, afraid she would be a dead weight against him.

When they finally clambered up to the road the van was only a few paces away. Stacey put the girl on her feet and took the light; on either side the water lapped against the roadbed, but so far the black asphalt leading towards the town was wet only with rain.

"Put on the coat," he ordered the girl, and held the light on her. He noticed, almost absently, the way her wet clothes clung to the slim lines of her body, the shadowed curve of her lashes, the look of her mouth with the rain on it. Then he saw again the dull red bruise that was beginning to discolour her cheek, and felt an anger so sudden and violent that it surprised him.

She was looking back towards the house. "It's a nice house," she said wistfully. "I'm sorry you have to leave it like this."

Not sure that he could control his voice, Stacey said nothing. The silence continued as they drove towards town, a strained, uneasy silence that was almost tangible, but John Stacey was thinking too hard to break it with meaningless chitchat. There was nothing to be said, in any case; the lights of the town were ahead of them and the river was behind them, and that seemed to wrap the case up neatly.

Maybe, and maybe not. Stacey stopped the van in Main Street. "They've set up an emergency centre at the schoolhouse," he said, very careful with the words. "Somebody there will give you dry clothes and food, and a place to sleep." He opened the door and stepped out into the rain, looking up

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at their faces in the faint light from the dashboard. "I'll be over as soon as I can."

He held out the keys to Dan. Their eyes met, and then Stacey saw the wariness in the boy's face change to an incredulous disbelief.

"Don't worry about Nixon," Stace said. "I'll talk to Mac about it. You can always give him back the money, and maybe we can persuade him not to press charges. We'll work something out."

He wouldn't let himself look at Sara again. Slamming the door, he turned and strode off in the rain. Behind him, almost immediately, he heard the van start noisily and move away.

He found Mac in the sheriff's office.

"Stace," McNalty said, grinning. "Thought I might have to send the National Guard out to get you."

"How's it going?"

"The town isn't in danger yet," Mac said, sobering, "but I've got a crowd working out at the power plant. I was just going to have a look." He stood at the door, staring out at the drenching rain. "What did you do with those kids, Stace?"

"They're at the schoolhouse."

"It's the law," Mac said. "Nixon's been on my back all day."

"I'm crying," Stacey said. "Why don't you leave them alone until tomorrow?"

Mac gave him a quick glance. "As a personal favour?"

Reluctantly, Stacey tried to see things the way the boy would. The road leading west, away from the river, was still clear; he had a van, full of petrol, and a pocketful of stolen money. There was always an easy way, if that was what you were looking for. "As a personal favour," he said. "They deserve a break."

"O.K., Stace, for you I'll do it. Mind if I ask why you're so interested?"

"Go ahead," Stacey said amiably. "Just don't expect an answer."

He didn't know the answer himself. Or the answers to all the other questions crowding into his mind. It'd be a relief to get to work, even the frustrating and precarious business of trying to hold back, with a few sandbags and earth dikes, the Big Muddy at the flood.

Most of the able-bodied men in town were at the power plant, labouring feverishly in the glare of headlights from a dozen parked cars. At one side a Red Cross van was parked, dispensing hot coffee and sandwiches, while a steady line of lorries dumped

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damp soil for the bags waiting to be filled and passed, human-chain fashion, to the line of defence round the vulnerable power plant. Beyond the buildings, at the far edge of a field, a dark line of barely moving water betrayed the presence of the enemy.

Stacey found himself in the long line of men passing the heavy bags. Two men to a bag, they received one, grunted, swung it between them and heaved it on, straightened, then reached for the next one. Standing in mud ankle-deep, their clothes sodden and backs aching, they worked on steadily against time, urgency pushing them.

By midnight they had done as much as they could. Stacey, dropping out of line for a cup of coffee, leaned his shoulders against a lorry and drank gratefully, trying to remember a time when he hadn't been wet and tired to the bone. There had been such a time, he was sure, some hours and days ago; then, against his will, he thought of Sara Moore and the boy and his van, and the road leading west, away from the sheriff and Nixon and the kind of fools who did everything the hard way, who farmed on credit and the whims of the river and never knew when they were licked.

Somebody spoke close beside him. "You look just about all in. I told them to save a bed for you at the schoolhouse."

Stacey raised his head. The boy, leaning against the lorry as if he needed the support, was incredibly dirty, his hands crusted with mud, and his face streaked black with dirt and rain.

"I've had some experience at filling bags," he said, "so I volunteered. Should have had better sense, I guess. I'm afraid your mack's ruined."

Stacey said nothing. The boy didn't smile, but his eyes, meeting Stacey's, held an unmistakable flicker of mockery. He fished in his pocket and held out the keys.

"I left Sara at the schoolhouse," he said. "The van's parked over on the road." After a perceptible pause he added, "Thanks."

For a long moment they looked at each other, letting it lie there between them. Then Stacey grinned. "If you've got a couple of beds reserved, we might as well put 'em to good use. Let's go."

The boy's face changed suddenly, went blank and pale. "You go ahead," he said. "I'll be along later." He looked past Stacey, then took several deliberate steps away from him. "Go on," he said, almost desperately. "I'll see you later."

A man pushed by Stacey, shouldered him roughly out of the way, and grabbed the boy's arm. "Well, you didn't run far," he said. "I knew I'd find you sooner or later." He looked

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round him, and his eyes fell on Stacey. "You there," he said harshly, "call the sheriff."

Stacey didn't move. He took another long drink of coffee and surveyed George Nixon impassively, noting the large beefy shoulders, the flat red face and small eyes, smaller now with rage, and the protruding stomach clinched in tightly by his belt.

Scowling, Nixon turned back to Dan, tightening his grip until the boy was forced to his knees. "I can settle with you myself. We'll find the sheriff later."

Dan didn't struggle. Reaching in his pocket, he pulled out a roll of notes. "There's your money," he said evenly. "All of it."

Nixon cursed unpleasantly. Ignoring the money, he hit Dan in the face, a savage backhand blow that caught the boy off balance and sent him sprawling in the mud at Nixon's feet.

Stacey dropped his cup and straightened. But he forced himself to wait, watching the boy as he got up, still holding out the money.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Sorry I took the money, and sorry I hit you. But I'm not going back with you. I'm through, and so is Sara."

Nixon laughed. "Yeah, you're through. But I'm not."

"I'm sorry," Dan said. "I said I was sorry."

He didn't look sorry. But he had said it, and there was the roll of notes, still intact inside a tight rubber band. He hadn't fought back, either, or tried to defend himself; he just stood there and took it, stubbornly insisting that he was sorry.

Nixon cursed again. "You ain't as sorry as you're gonna be. As for the girl, she's got no other place to go and my wife can use her in the house. But they've plenty of places for your type."

Stacey looked at the boy's white face. Then he moved until he was standing just behind him, facing George Nixon.

"Take the money, Nixon," he said quietly.

Nixon stared at him. "What's it to you?"

"Take it," Stacey said, "or I'll be a witness that you gave it to him. Paying some of his back wages, maybe."

"It's no business of yours, mister."

"Take the money and get moving," Stacey said, "unless you're looking for a good reason to swear out another assault warrant." He flexed his hands, feeling the weariness fall away from him as if it had never existed. "This time you'll have plenty of evidence to show for it."

Nixon, his face redder than ever, looked Stacey over, then took a step backwards. "I've got my rights," he said. "Don't think I haven't." He spat in the mud and wiped his mouth

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with the back of his hand. "I'll talk to McNalty about this."

"Do that," Stacey said. "You can start looking for him right now."

The moment stretched into silence. Stacey, knowing what Nixon would do, felt a wry amusement at his own disappointment.

Nixon snatched the money from Dan's hand and turned away, cursing audibly under his breath. Dan and Stacey watched him go, pushing his way through the crowd with an exasperated fury.

"You must think I've been sitting around all day," McNalty said behind them, "just waiting for you to drum up a little business for me."

Stacey put his hand on Dan's shoulder, feeling the slight muscles tremble with tension. "You have to earn your pay, Mac," he said easily. "Some of the taxpayers are beginning to complain."

"So I heard." Mac shook his head, sighing. "I'll have to book him, Stace. I've got no choice."

"Tomorrow," Stacey reminded him. "Better check with my bank before you fix bail. I'm solvent at the moment, but don't make it too steep."

Mac grinned. "We'll talk about that tomorrow." Then, looking at his cigarette, "Couple of weeks till the next term of court. Nixon'll probably cool off by then."

"I'm not worried," Stacey said. "We've got a better case than his." His hand turned the boy round. "See you later, Mac."

He and Dan walked together to the van. The rain had slackened and the night was quiet; in the darkness the river still moved, but they had done all they could. The rest would have to wait until tomorrow.

"Look," the boy said, forming the words with difficulty, "I don't know how to say it . . ."

"Then don't," Stacey said promptly. "Save it till tomorrow."

Neither of them spoke again until Stacey parked the van outside the schoolhouse. Then Stacey said casually, "I'll need some help cleaning up the mess." He made his decision then, knowing it had been working up inside him for some hours past. "I was thinking of selling up. But I've changed my mind and it'll go a lot easier with another man on the place."

Dan said, disbelieving, "You were going to quit?"

"Not now," Stacey said. "Maybe next year, if the crops are good and the river behaves. And maybe not."

He had an idea the kid would understand. You looked for the easiest way, or you didn't. You ran away when the going got

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rough, or you held on. The way you decided was a measure of the kind of man you were, down inside where it really mattered; good or bad, it was a thing you had to live with for the rest of your life.

"I could use a job," Dan said at last.

"It's a deal?"

"What about Sara?" Dan asked slowly.

Stacey looked down at the boy. "Between us, we ought to be able to take care of her," he said quietly. Then, because he had worked it all out a long time before, "She can stay in town with Mac and his wife, and come out to the farm and help during the day. Or maybe she'd like a job in town. We'll work it out."

Dan let out his breath. "Sure. We'll work it out."

The crowded schoolhouse was warm and noisy, smelling of wet clothes and hot food. Babies cried, women scolded and called and threatened, a mob of kids played up and down the aisles between the makeshift beds. They found Sara in a corner, standing guard over three empty beds and a pile of blankets; she was wearing Army denims several sizes too large for her, and her dark hair had been rubbed dry and brushed into a ponytail.

"George Nixon was here," she said. "He said—" She stopped, looking from Dan to Stacey.

Stacey said quickly, "It's O.K., Sara. He won't bother you again."

Beside him, Dan dropped on to a bed. "You'd better get some rest," he said. "Stace is going to put us to work emptying all those bags we filled today."

Her eyes widened. "Do you want us to stay?" she whispered.

"Not much of a bargain, I'm afraid. The house is all that's left, and it won't be worth much when the river finishes with it."

He waited for her answer and knew it was immensely important to him.

"We can always plant more lilacs," she said.

Stacey had told himself he wouldn't touch her. But her mouth was unsteady again and he saw the glisten of tears behind her dark lashes, and his arms went round her and he repeated, his face against her hair, "It's O.K.," as if they were the only words that could tell her how it was.

He looked at Dan. The kid was stretched on the bed, his hands behind his head. He grinned at Stacey.

It was the first time Stacey had seen him grin. It was the first time for a lot of things, Stacey thought, and the weariness settled in him like the greatest peace he had ever known.

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MIGHT

Yon lion's 'et oor Albert
And 'im in his Sunday clothes, too.
MARRIATT EDGAR, *The Lion and Albert*

Lion at Play

He stood for a second, his eyes very bright, his limbs quivering, lashing himself with his tail. Then he made a leap high over their heads and landed on the other side of the table. Laughing, though she didn't know why, Lucy scrambled over it to reach him. Aslan leaped again. A mad chase began. Round and round the hill-top he led them, now hopelessly out of their reach, now letting them almost catch his tail, now diving between them, now tossing them in the air with his huge and beautifully velveted paws . . . and whether it was more like playing with a thunderstorm or playing with a kitten Lucy could never make up her mind.

C. S. LEWIS,
The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe

At Home with St. Jerome

St. Jerome in his study kept a great big cat,
It's always in his pictures, with its feet upon the mat.
Did he give it milk to drink, in a little dish?
When it came to Fridays, did he give it fish?
If I lost my little cat, I'd be sad without it;
I should ask St. Jeremy what to do about it;
I should ask St. Jeremy, just because of that,
For he's the only Saint I know who kept a pussy cat.

ANON

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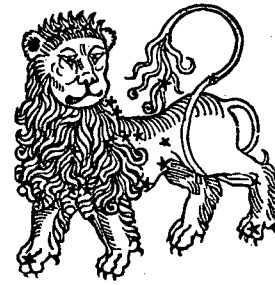
and MANE



Pride of Lions

SNUG: Have you the lion's part written? pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study.

QUINCE: You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring.

BOTTOM: Let me play the lion too. I will roar, that I will do any man's heart good to hear me; I will roar, that I will make the duke say, "Let him roar again, let him roar again."

QUINCE: An you should do it too terribly, you would fright the duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek . . .

BOTTOM: I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove; I will roar you as 'twere any nightingale.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Much Ado in the Zoo

Now, just imagine how it feels
When first your toes, and then your heels,
And then by gradual degrees,
Your shins and ankles, calves and knees,
Are slowly eaten, bit by bit.
No wonder Jim detested it!
No wonder that he shouted "Hi!"
The honest keeper heard his cry,
Though very fat he almost ran
To help the little gentleman.
"Ponto," he ordered as he came
(For Ponto was the lion's name)
"Ponto!" he cried, with angry frown,
"Let go, sir! Down, sir! Put it down!"

HILAIRE BELLOC, *Jim*

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Lion Baiting

Standing on her hind legs, Elsa inspected my paint-box and typewriter suspiciously; and resting both her front paws on the unfortunate tools, she licked my face and wanted to be assured of my affection before I was allowed to start work. Then she settled down at my feet and I began, full of inspiration; but I had not reckoned with our audience. As soon as I tried to concentrate I heard the inquiring bark of a baboon peeping through the foliage; then the bush on the opposite bank became alive with inquisitive watching faces . . .

Elsa, who could tolerate the noise no longer, plunged into the river and swam across, accompanied by the hilarious shrieks of the baboons. As soon as she had reached firm ground she jumped at the nearest of the little tormentors. He swung tantalisingly low but nimbly avoided a spanking by hopping to a higher branch . . . The more infuriated Elsa became the more they enjoyed teasing her—they sat just out of reach, scratching their posteriors, pretending to be utterly unaware of the raging lioness just below. The scene was so funny that in spite of Elsa's humiliation I opened my ciné camera and filmed it. This was too much for her; as soon as she saw me focusing the hated box on her she splashed back through the river and, before I had time to secure the camera, she leapt on me and we both rolled over in the sand . . .

JOY ADAMSON, *Born Free*

Cave Leonem

He nosed into the darkness—yes,
The air of something *reeked,*
" Anybody there—body there ? " his thin voice
Echo-ed and squeaked.

At once he heard a gnash of teeth,
A roar that rang in iron
" Sir, how dare you trespass! This
Is my home," said a lion.

" Whisht now! There's no need for such
A flummox and to-do,"
The frail old Father kindly said.
" I'm sure there's room for two."

" Your bed of straw is wide enough
To share, for I'm not stout."
But the lion turned up his nose at this
And sulkily stalked out.

IAN SERRAILLIER, *The Cave in the Desert*

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I'M BETTER THAN YOU

You thought I was only bluffing, but I wasn't

BY HENRY SLESAR

NICKI wasn't at home when the telephone call came, and the roommate who took the message was too flustered to make a coherent report. She wasn't sure about *where* Mr. Wolfe had seen Nicki perform: the rep company or the two-minute walk-on in *Gypsy* or the television commercial for that upholstery cleanser; but what was the difference? Nicki was supposed to go to the Broadhurst Theatre at four *prompt*, if she wanted a reading.

Nicki was so flustered that she burst out of the rooming-house without even passing a comb through her tangled blonde hair. She walked the thirteen blocks to the theatre, not allowing herself the indulgence of a taxi ride. It might be a job, sure, but the casting had been in progress for over a month, and nothing could be left but the smallest of parts.

There were only five people on stage when Nicki walked in, and four of them barely glanced up when she stepped hesitantly on to the boards. The fifth, a youngish, bony-headed man in a pullover, grinned and came over. She knew it was Wolfe, the director, an import from a downtown theatre who was making his Broadway start with a new comedy.

"I know you," he said. "You're Nicki Porter. Thanks for coming."

"Thank *you*, Mr. Wolfe," she said shyly, using her full-throated voice well. Nicki wasn't outstandingly pretty or even provocatively plain; her best feature was her voice.

"I'll tell you what this is," Wolfe said. "There's a young widow in this play, very young, not exactly the mourner type. The part's pretty small, but it's the kind of thing that gets noticed. Hey, Jerry," he called to the heavy-set man talking earnestly to a handsome woman in blue slacks. "Toss me a script."

Nicki fingered the pages eagerly, and the director said, "Try the speech on page twelve, Mary Lou's speech. She's a southern

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type, but we don't want any fried-chicken accent." He started to walk off, but stopped to say, "Oh, look, Nicki, I want to make something clear. Frankly, we stopped casting the show last Friday. The only part I was dubious about was Mary Lou's, and we sort of settled on somebody. Then I remembered seeing you in something or other at Watkins Glen—"

"*Voice of the Turtle.*"

"That's right. Anyway, you kind of *looked* like Mary Lou in that, so I traced you through Equity. But don't get *too* hopeful about this, because who knows?" He shrugged, sharing with her his understanding of the theatre's uncertainty.

The speech on page twelve was meaty. She knew she was reading well, and when she was through, the woman in the blue slacks struck her hands together in light, approving applause.

"Well, fine," Wolfe said with a sigh. "That's just fine, Nicki. We won't keep you waiting for the decision very long; rehearsals have to start next week." He flashed a smile. "Where's my manners? Want you to meet the gang."

He propelled her towards the group, and tossed off the prominent theatrical names as if they were casual guests in somebody's living-room. Nicki shook hands, fighting the flush that was rising and spreading to the tips of her exposed ears. She was always this way, shy and tongue-tied before the easy-mannered people who knew the rewards of theatrical success. They were the anchored ones, solidly fixed on what seemed to her to be a capricious and treacherous ocean. As she left the theatre, she felt like a small craft drifting out to sea.

But the watery analogies that filled her mind vanished once the stage door closed behind her. The solid reality of the sidewalk brought her with a bump to the realisation that she had been liked, really liked, and that the part was going to be hers. She turned and looked again at the theatre posters, and when she saw the young, dark-haired girl coming out of the lobby pause to look at her, she felt an impulse to run up to this stranger and babble out the story of her sudden hopefulness. Instead, she turned and headed for the cafeteria on the corner.

She was about ready for her second cup of coffee when she spotted the dark-haired girl just three tables away, looking as if she expected an invitation. Nicki smiled, just a small smile that could be construed as a private pleasantry or an acknowledgment. The girl must have taken it the latter way; she picked up her handbag and came over.

"May I sit down?" she said. There was a breathless quality in her voice, and her white teeth were biting her lower lip. She was pretty, Nicki thought, in a pinched-face Julie Harris way,

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but her eyes were swollen, even protruding. "I'd like to talk to you a minute," she said.

"Sure," Nicki said, moving her things closer to her side of the small table. "I think I saw you at the theatre."

"Yes," she said, sitting down. "I was there, but please don't mention it, not to Mr. Wolfe, I mean. You see, I'm Jill Yarborough; maybe Mr. Wolfe mentioned me."

"No, he didn't."

"Not even that?" She made herself laugh, and it struck Nicki as being theatrical.

"Are you an actress?"

"That's what I keep telling them. I was sitting in the back of the theatre during your reading. You were pretty good, I thought. I couldn't hear you too well, you weren't projecting, but I think you were good."

"Thanks," Nicki said, stirring uncomfortably and suddenly afraid of the smouldering look in the girl's eyes.

"I'm surprised Mr. Wolfe didn't say anything about me, because he practically promised me the part last Friday. The Mary Lou part. You wouldn't know it to listen to me, but I'm from the south—deep south, that is—but I've been north so long you can hardly tell by my accent. Can you?"

"No."

"Well, I worked like crazy to get rid of my drawl, and then *this* thing comes along. Wouldn't it kill you?" She put a gloved hand to her lips as if to stifle a giggle, but there wasn't any. "I haven't had a *real* job, an acting job, I mean, for almost a year. When Wolfe said I was just what he was looking for, I could have crowed like a rooster. Only then he rang me Saturday morning and said he wasn't sure yet. That was a lousy Saturday morning, let me tell you."

"I'm sorry, Miss—"

"Yarborough. Only call me Jill. Your name's Nicki?"

"Yes."

"Well, I didn't turn on the oven or anything," Jill Yarborough said, her eyes staring through Nicki's forehead. "But I didn't crow any more either. I thought I'd hang around the theatre today, just to see what would happen. And I saw."

Nicki wanted to touch the girl's hand or do something to mitigate the pain in her voice. But all she could do was answer in choked tones.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I know how it is, too. I've been sitting in casting offices for the last eight months myself. But I don't think anything's definite about this—"

Jill Yarborough laughed. "Oh, come on. You ought to be

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able to tell. He *likes* you, Nicki. That's for sure." The smile went. "Only I'm better than you are. Better for the part, better in every way."

Nicki, embarrassed, looked into her empty cup. The girl didn't say anything else for a while, but her swollen eyes were still on Nicki's face, and she could hear her breath clearly, even in the clatter of the restaurant.

Then she said, her voice so low that Nicki had to strain to hear, "Don't take the job, Nicki. Tell him you can't take it."

"What?"

"Don't take the part. Ring Mr. Wolfe and tell him you don't want it. That there's something else you have to do, that you've got another offer."

It was a shock to hear the blatant words, the unashamed suggestion.

"You can't be serious?"

"I am. I am. I'm better than you are, Nicki, I've worked harder. You don't deserve it the way I do."

"But *I* need the work, too. You can't—"

"Not like I need it. Not the way I do. You couldn't." The girl shut her eyes, and the action was merciful, like a shade pulled down over a glaring window light. Then her eyes opened and she said, "If you take the part, I'll kill you. So help me, Nicki, that's what I'll do."

Nicki gasped and scraped back her chair.

"I'll kill you and then I'll kill myself. I've thought of doing that for a long time anyway. I gave myself this one last chance, and that's all. I was going to take this."

She fumbled in her bag. Half hidden in her trembling fingers, she exposed a small, dark brown bottle, the poison warning clearly outlined at the bottom of the label.

"You can't threaten me," Nicki said in a whisper. "I won't let you scare me out of taking the—"

"I'm not trying to scare you. I'm just telling you the fact. You say yes to Wolfe and we both die. If you want to tell the police about this, you go ahead and see where it gets you. I'll laugh my head off and say that you're crazy; see what good it does you."

She rose swiftly from the table, turning her head as if to avoid a display of tears, and gathered up her bag and the single glove she had yanked off her hand in her nervousness. Then she dropped half a dollar on the table and went hurriedly to the revolving doors.

It wasn't a matter of calculating her decision. It was being made for Nicki in some busy chamber of her mind, all the time

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she walked back to the rooming-house, and all through the excited conversation with Theresa, the friend who shared her room and her aspirations. She didn't even mention Jill Yarborough; she wasn't going to be bluffed out of her first real break in almost a year.

At eight-thirty the next morning, the telephone rang. Nicki pushed pillows off her bed and fumbled for the receiver.

"Nicki? This is Carl Wolfe—"

She shut her eyes and prayed.

"If you like us, we like you," the director said. "We're having the first meeting of the cast Tuesday morning at ten. Can you be there?"

"Oh, sure," Nicki said casually. Then she hung up, walked nonchalantly round the bed, picked up a pillow, and thumped the back of her sleeping roommate. "Wake up, you fool!" she screamed ecstatically. "I've got the job!"

She forgot about Jill Yarborough. Memorising her three-page part made her forget. Carl Wolfe, gracious, demanding, and biting at the first meeting she attended, made her forget. And then, a faltering first-time "blocking" rehearsal, followed by a triumphant run-through that Wolfe grudgingly called "pretty near perfect," made her forget the burning, protruding eyes, the small brown bottle, the agony and threat of Jill Yarborough.

On Wednesday night, she walked home from the theatre at seven-thirty, tired but still elated. Theresa had wanted them to go out that evening; she had a boyfriend named Freddy, and Freddy had a friend who'd love to meet an honest-to-God working actress, but Nicki had refused. When she used the key to the apartment, she walked into darkness and solitude. She undressed, washed her hair, put on a housecoat, and flopped on the sofa with a book. When the doorbell rang, she got up to answer it without hesitation, because she had forgotten about Jill Yarborough.

She was wearing a long black coat with a fake fur collar high round the neck, clasped by a nervously-working hand. She said Nicki's name, and Nicki almost moved to slam the door on her, but she didn't. The girl walked in.

"Wasn't easy finding you," she said. "I had to ask the stage doorman."

"Please don't make any trouble," Nicki said wearily. "It's all settled now. There's no need to make a scene, Miss Yarborough—"

"Call me Jill," the girl said. She looked round the apartment briefly, and then moved to take off her coat. For a moment,

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Nicki thought it was going to be all right. Her manner was relaxed, casual.

She dropped the coat on a chair. "It's a nice place," she said. "Do you live here alone?"

"I have a roommate. She should be back any minute . . ."

Jill Yarborough smiled. "I'll bet she won't. I'll bet she's got a date, and you haven't. I know how it is when you're working. You don't even care if there's a man in your life. Isn't that true?"

"I—was too tired to go out tonight."

"Naturally."

The girl sat, folding her hands primly in her lap; until then, Nicki had been afraid to meet her eyes. Now she did, and saw that their hot light was undiminished since the time of their first meeting. "How did the first rehearsal go?" she said lightly.

"All right, I suppose."

"He's a funny guy, isn't he? That Carl Wolfe, I mean. One minute he's sweet as pie; the next, he's chewing you out like a sergeant-major. I've heard about him."

"He's really very nice."

The girl smiled again, sleepily. "I'll bet you thought I didn't mean what I said to you that time. Did you?"

"You were upset that day—"

Jill Yarborough shifted the coat on to her lap. Her hand dipped into a pocket. Nicki, on the sofa, stiffened. The hand came out with the brown bottle.

"Oh, I meant it," the girl said dreamily. "I meant every word. I was going to kill you, and then myself."

"Please," Nicki said anxiously. "Don't do anything foolish that—"

"You thought I was only bluffing, but I wasn't. I was right for that part. I'm a better actress than you are, a whole lot better. You know what's wrong with you?" she asked, matter-of-factly. "You're all voice and no body. You only act with your larynx."

She turned the bottle round in her hand. "I'm going to make you drink this," she said.

Nicki squirmed to the edge of the sofa and stood up. "I'll scream," she whispered. "If you try anything I'll scream the house down. There are people right next door . . ."

"You don't have what it takes," Jill Yarborough said bitterly. "You're not willing to fight for a part, not the way I am. To get some place in the theatre, you have to be a little mad, and you have to be able to fight every step of the way. That's why I'm better than you, Nicki."

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She uncorked the bottle.

"Get out of here!" Nicki yelled.

Jill Yarborough grinned, and stood up. She came forward, her shoulders hunched, her eyes and teeth grotesquely white in her dark, tormented face. She moved slowly, a dream figure, nightmarish.

"This is for you, Nicki," she said, holding up the bottle. "For you . . ."

Nicki screamed.

The girl stopped, and her face changed. She put her shaking hand to her forehead; the heat in her eyes faded. Then she caught her breath, and tipped the mouth of the small bottle to her lips. She threw back her head, and the contents disappeared down her throat. She swallowed hard, painfully, and let the bottle drop from her fingers and bounce on the carpet. Nicki screamed again and covered her eyes; when she looked once more, Jill Yarborough hadn't moved, stunned by her own action. Nicki, sobbing, went to her.

"Get away from me," the girl said hoarsely. "You got what you wanted, get away." She took a step, and her knees buckled. "Oh, God, it hurts," she said, holding her stomach.

"I'll get a doctor—"

"Stay where you are!"

"You've got to let me help you!"

Jill Yarborough went to the sofa, leaning against its arm. She began to retch, and sank to her knees. It was then that Nicki grabbed the telephone . . .

The internes who took Jill Yarborough into Nicki's bedroom were both young, cool, and taciturn. There were strangled sounds behind the closed bedroom door for almost half an hour. Nicki sat quaking on the sofa in the living-room, waiting for word.

Finally, one of the internes emerged, a crisp young man with blond hair. The ordeal over, he was more willing to be friendly. When Nicki babbled her questions at him, he grinned.

"She'll be O.K.," he said. "Good as new in a day or two. We used the stomach pump and gave her a sedative." He sat down and lit a cigarette. "There's something I have to ask you now. Something rather important."

"Yes?"

"The girl claims she thought she was drinking cough syrup, that the whole business was a mistake. Were you here at the time it happened?"

"Yes, I was."

He considered her thoughtfully. "You know, if she swallowed

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that stuff deliberately, we'd have to report it to the police. Suicide's a crime in this state."

"You mean, she'd be arrested?"

"Not as bad as all that. She'd be sent to an observation ward in one of the city hospitals, so we'd keep an eye on her, give a psychiatric check-up. These suicide types, they don't quit on the first try." He eyed her speculatively. "Could you corroborate her story, miss?"

"Yes," Nicki said, looking away. "It was purely an accident. She had no reason to commit suicide, none at all."

When the ambulance had gone, Nicki tried calling the Broadhurst, but there was no answer. She found Carl Wolfe's telephone number in the directory and, luckily, he was at home. He listened to her opening statements in silence.

"It's just something I can't help," she said. "I'll have to be out of town for the next few weeks, and that means I won't be available for rehearsals. So maybe it's best if we call it off."

"I understand," Wolfe said finally. "I'm sorry about this, Nicki. I think you were right for the part. Maybe some other time . . ."

"You have someone else in mind, haven't you? I wouldn't want you to be stranded or anything like that."

"Yes," Wolfe said, "we have another candidate. The one I was giving the part to, until you came along."

Thank God, Nicki thought. Then she said a quick good-bye and hung up.

She tiptoed quietly into the bedroom. The girl was still asleep, but she stirred and opened her eyes as Nicki approached the bed.

"I've called Carl Wolfe," Nicki said coldly. "Can you hear me, Jill? I called Carl Wolfe and said I didn't want the part. It's all yours," she said bitterly. "I don't want it half as much as you do."

Jill Yarborough smiled. "I'm better than you are," she said softly. "I deserve the part. Didn't I prove it to you? Didn't I?"

"What do you mean?"

"I nearly died," Jill Yarborough said, and then laughed raspingly. "Could you swallow water and nearly die? That's all it was, you know. Water! Could you do it? Could you?" She struggled to sit up, and Nicki backed away from the bed. "Could you?" Jill Yarborough screamed at her, in rage, in righteousness, and in exultant triumph.

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‡ **Baron Philippe de Vomécourt, who himself gave fearless and devoted service to the cause of French Resistance, describes the fate of a colleague.**

GESTAPO

BY PHILIPPE DE VOMECOURT

IN FRANCE during 1943, the build-up of Resistance groups attached to Special Operations Executive in London continued. In the course of the year nearly four hundred parachute operations were carried out. The réseaux were fed with hundreds of tons of arms and materials for carrying out the sabotage of factories, shipping, railways, arms, and petrol dumps, and for direct action against the German forces. No fewer than one hundred and twenty aircraft were placed at the disposal of the organisation in London. If the Allied advance had not yet reached France, the Resistance were very much part of the total war now being waged.

But let there be no mistake about the kind of country into which these men were parachuted. Or of the fate that awaited them, if captured.

By 1943, no member of the Resistance, whether an agent parachuted into the country or a woman offering a safe house, expected or received anything but the worst. Of thousands of stories that could be told, let one example suffice.

JACQUES was a radio operator. He dropped into France in 1943, and enjoyed his freedom for only a few weeks before he was picked up near Moulins. He was taken to the Gestapo at Clermont-Ferrand. He was tied up and beaten. The Gestapo went about their business in their familiar manner. They wanted his code so that they could take his place and also intercept messages to the Resistance.

When crude slugging and kicking proved ineffective, they turned to more appalling forms of torture. They held a flame in front of his right eye. They poked at it with a steel bar. Still he told them nothing. Lunchtime arrived and, like office workers

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putting aside their papers for the break, the Gestapo secured Jacques with handcuffs to a chair and went downstairs to eat.

He was imprisoned in a room on the second floor. He was left in agony. He had lost the sight of his eye. But he writhed and strained to get free. He managed to break the chair to which he had been bound.

He went to the window. With the sight remaining to him he assessed the prospects of escape. It was difficult enough, but what worse could happen to him if he were caught trying to escape? Still handcuffed, he clambered out of the window and fell on to a small roof below. His fall made a loud noise. They must have heard me, he thought. They'll get me again. His limbs shaking, he ran along a wall, and from there jumped into the street below. With his handcuffed hands held in front of him, he stumbled.

The Germans had heard him. They ran out from the house. He regained his balance and ran ahead of them up the street and took the first side-turning to the right. He saw a man walking towards him. His wits still served him well.

"Don't say anything," he said to the man. He put up his two hands, chained together, removed the man's hat, put it on his own head, and strolled slowly on his way.

When the Germans turned the same corner, they saw two men. One was walking towards them. Another walking casually away from them with a hat on his head. The deception succeeded. The Gestapo tried the next turning. They saw a man just rounding the corner. They pursued him. By the time they caught up with him, they discovered it was not their man. Meanwhile, Jacques had turned right, then left, and into hiding in a backyard.

At nightfall, Jacques, still in great pain and fearful of every movement in the streets, left his hiding-place and put distance between him and the small town with its Gestapo headquarters. He went into the country. He felt very hungry. He took what vegetables he could from the fields; they gave small satisfaction but they did a little to appease his hunger. He slept in woods that night and kept as close to them as possible during the following morning as he walked on, away from the Gestapo.

He was some thirty miles away from his torturers when he felt he must stop and take a chance. He was ravenous, and he had to get rid of his handcuffs. He made for the road in the hope of seeing someone who would help him.

The road was fringed by trees. He sat in the cover of the trees, but left himself a sight of anyone passing. "The first person who comes along the road will do," he said to himself.

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" I'll stop him, and show him the state I'm in, and ask him to help me. I must."

An old man came into sight.

" His face is a bit thin," Jacques said to himself. " Doesn't look quite honest to me. He might be a traitor. He might give me away." He watched the old man go by.

He waited. He saw another man coming along, trudging slowly towards him in heavy peasant boots.

Too fat, Jacques thought. Wouldn't understand. He'd be afraid. Dangerous.

A third man was too well-dressed, a fourth had the kind of narrow eyes that Jacques had always distrusted. Or so he told himself. And who could blame him? He must take a chance to save himself, and yet if he picked the wrong man he would be back to the torture again. At least, for the moment, starving, handcuffed, in pain, he was free.

The whole of that day passed, with Jacques examining everyone who passed and dismissing each man as untrustworthy. The mental torture was almost as bad as the physical torture of the Gestapo. His hands trembled, his heart thumped. He fainted.

When he came round, he knew he must take the chance no matter what the consequence.

" I must do something," he said to himself. " I'll die if I stay here like this, anyway." He saw a man approaching on a bicycle. Jacques left the cover of the trees and stepped into the road. The man needed no call to stop. Jacques was covered in dirt and blood. His eye was a ghastly sight. He held his handcuffs in front of him.

" Look at me," said Jacques. " Look at the mess I'm in. Please, can you do something for me, can you help me, *please*?"

" I'm just the blacksmith," said the man, getting off his bike. " I can't take you into the village looking like that. But I'll help you. Just sit there for a bit, and I'll go back and fetch another bike. Then we'll ride to my place and I'll fix you up." The blacksmith remounted and rode off. Jacques sat down to wait again. He waited and waited, his fear quickly taking control of him.

Is he really going to bring a bike for me or is he going to fetch the police? The Gestapo will come again. Then . . . His imagination needed no stimulus to feel again the flame before his eye. He was never to forget his torture at the hands of the Gestapo.

I'm sure that at this moment he's giving me away. He had that sort of glint in his eye . . . Fool. Now I'm being melodramatic. He's probably doing just what he said he'd do. He'll

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be back—he looked honest enough, really, didn't he? . . . No, I'm sure I was a fool to trust him, I must get away from here.

He stood up. He sat down again. He went through all the torture of imagining the man betraying him, of the Gestapo taking him back to that room once more, of the flame approaching his eye. He tried to start walking again.

"No, it's no good. I can't. I can't. If they come, they come. I can't walk any farther. I've got to trust him. I can trust him, I'm sure I can. I had a good look at his face. A pleasant sort of man. A jolly man. He can't give me away. He mustn't give me away. He shan't give me away . . ." For one hour the anguish and self-torture continued.

Jacques was face to face with the kind of fear that others would never be able to imagine. Those of us who escaped the kind of torture and extremities of fear that he experienced can only be thankful. Any who survived the war without that kind of experience should be thankful to those who suffered for them. I want to try to show what absolute terror possessed Jacques as he waited there by the roadside. And yet he stayed, just as he had refused to submit to the Gestapo.

He waited for one whole hour, an hour in which he lived through more sensations of fear than most men know in their whole lives. Then he saw the blacksmith returning with two bicycles. Jacques stood up. He was trembling.

"What's the matter, man? What on earth is the matter?" The blacksmith grinned as he spoke.

"I was scared," said Jacques. Brave men who are afraid do not mind admitting it. "I was frightened—frightened to death. I thought you might be betraying me."

The blacksmith was a good man, a man of heart. He understood at once.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't realise. If I'd thought, I'd have put you on the bicycle and I'd have walked along the road with you. I'm sorry. I just didn't think. You'll be all right now. You come home with me."

Jacques mounted the second bicycle and they rode together into the village. Jacques gripped the middle of the handlebars as well as the handcuffs would allow him. As soon as they got to the blacksmith's shop, the blacksmith set about breaking the handcuffs. (Handcuffs can only be broken; they cannot be sawn.) The operation gave Jacques some small pain as the cuffs bit into his wrists. But the pain was nothing beside the relief of losing the handcuffs and of knowing that he had found safety. Both Jacques and the blacksmith kept pieces of the handcuffs as souvenirs.

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The blacksmith and his wife looked after the radio operator until he had recovered his nerve and the cuts and bruises on his body healed. But the sight in his right eye had gone for ever.

After a week or so, Jacques felt strong enough to move on. He joined the local maquis and through them made contact with London. He asked for instructions.

"Escape through the Pyrenees and come back to England," London ordered him. Jacques refused at first. He said he wanted to stay in France and continue his work. But London insisted on his return. He had a hard and difficult time getting through the Pyrenees, but in the end he reached London. Eight months later, he dropped into France once more; the authorities in London were against his return, but he insisted. He came back and worked again as a radio operator for the Resistance. Can one imagine that sort of courage?

After his return, he always carried a revolver.

"If I'm ever in danger of arrest another time," he said, "I'll fight it out. And if I can't fight it out, I'll shoot myself. I'm not going through that again."

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An extract from "Who Lived to See the Day— The Story of the French Resistance 1940-1945" *by Philippe de Vomécourt (published Hutchinson)*

CODE COMFORT

Leslie Baxter was a veteran in experience and had a great reputation for sending witty but impertinent signals . . . He had at one time been deputed to land supplies in Albania and had jokingly requested a Destroyer escort, which to his amazement he was given.

On touching down in the cold light of dawn the Destroyer signalled him comfortingly: "We are covering you from seaward."

To which Baxter replied:

"We are covering you from landward."

Later on the return journey just outside Brindisi the Destroyer called him up and said:

"We are now in the Swept Channel."

"Concur," from Baxter.

"Intend to proceed into harbour."

L.C.T. 581 replied: "Approved."

To which the Destroyer sent a signal which Baxter assumed was in code, as it read: USAUCYSOD.

PETER BULL, *To Sea in a Sieve*

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IN THE BLACK TENTS

By Gerald Sparrow

THERE at the end of the reception hall, standing, robed in white, in a gold kafear headdress, a regal figure, was the Bedouin prince we had come to see, the Sheik Mithcal Pasha Al Faiz, absolute lord of forty thousand armed men, of his fifty-two sons, and fifteen wives. Gathered round him, sitting crosslegged on sheepskin rugs, were his subject-sheiks. Seeing us, the Sheik raised his right hand in a gesture of welcome, and my wife raised both her hands to her forehead, palm to palm, in the lovely gesture of greeting of her own country, Siam.

I think it was at that moment that the Sheik decided to make us welcome in the black tents of his people, the Beni Sakhr Bedouin.

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Looking back on our sojourn, I was proud to have made friends with the sons of men who had ridden with Feisal and Lawrence

" Welcome, welcome to our home. All we have is yours."

The sitting sheiks seemed dark and swarthy, but the Sheik himself was tall and fair. His grey eyes missed nothing, and I realised that our young and lively Ambassador in Beirut had been right when he had said to me, " Going to Jordan? You should try to catch up with the Sheik Mithcal Faiz. There is no one like him left now, the last of the great Bedouin princes and despots. He's very elusive. You'll see."

It had taken us a month in the rose-red city of Amman—and the kindness of Akef Al-Faiz, the Sheik's eldest son by his first wife, to arrange this meeting. The last Englishman, we were told, to be a guest of the Sheik had been Glubb Pasha—but he had been as a brother to the Bedouin.

No foreign woman had ever been received into the tents of the women. Chaluey, my wife, was to see the hidden life of the Bedouin women, unchanged in essentials since the foundation of the Ottoman Empire. When I asked if my wife could accompany me, only Bedouin good manners concealed the consternation of Akef Al-Faiz, but he said, " My father, the Sheik, will be delighted to receive you, both."

And when we left the Beni Sakhr, the Sheik himself said to me, " You are lucky to be so modern. Your charming wife can go everywhere with you."

The journey from Amman to the Sheik's desert stronghold at Madabar had been by car, by camel, and by foot. Although Chaluey took to riding a camel with enviable ease, I found its lurching technique tiring and exasperating. I think the Sheik sensed that we were tired after our journey for he said, " We will take ' mensafa ' now. Then, when you have eaten, you must rest. Tonight you will sleep well, and tomorrow I will show you many things."

At that moment servants entered, carrying the mensafa. It is an uncomplicated feast. Two sheep, cooked whole, with heads—and eyes—sit grotesquely on a cushion of rice and herbs some seven inches deep. The eyes, as I was to discover, are already cut from the sockets. They are detachable.

There is only one way to eat the mensafa and that is with your

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bare hands. No knives, spoons, or forks were laid at the Sheik's table. Twelve of us sat down to the feast, the Sheik himself and a younger son who had accompanied us from Amman, Chaluey, and myself, and eight of the sheiks who were here today and seemed to form a little court for Mithcal Faiz.

I envied Chaluey. Her remarkably long red fingernails plunged happily into the meat and rice. Her strong white teeth—at thirty she has never been to a dentist—tore the meat with ease. I watched the sheiks eating. They ate from the bone, quickly, neatly, their long brown hands dextrous. The rice they squeezed in their palms until it was a hot greasy ball and this they swallowed with the meat.

Towards the end of this simple but formidable meal the Sheik, with a gesture of great good humour, offered me a sheep's eye impaled on a fork. It was to be eaten. To refuse was social death. I drank a little arak from the glass at my side, swallowed the eye whole as one may an oyster—and drank a deep draught of arak to chase the expressive delicacy home.

The Sheik smiled. "You are doing very well," he said. "The ways of the Beni Sakhr must be a little strange to you, though there have been a few Englishmen who were as our brothers. Glubb Pasha, for instance . . ." It was clear that the Sheik remembered General Glubb with affection and respect. To this day the Arab Legion is recruited more and more, in officers and in men, from the reliant self-trained warriors of the Beni Sakhr.

The feast of flesh was over. Servants brought round rose-water, and we washed the mutton grease and the rice from our hands. Then we drank the Bedouin coffee that is brewed for a week and is black, and acid, and startlingly strong. It washed the taste of sheep from our mouths.

The Sheik took us out on to the Madabar hill on which his fortress is built. It was clear and cool as Jordan is in early spring. He pointed to the south, a rolling vista of plain and valley: "My personal land. We can grow barley there, about a hundred thousand dunums of good land, now arid from the drought."

He pointed to the east, his longer finger raised as if in benediction, saying more gently than I had heard him speak before, "The tents of my people. From here for three hundred miles, deep into Arabia."

I shaded my eyes to see more clearly what he had indicated, and there they were, low and countless, like so many black beetles against the yellow desert sand, the black tents of the Beni Sakhr we had come so far to see.

As the ball of fire which is the Jordanian sun sank in the west

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and, swiftly, darkness fell, I was shown my own black tent, and Chaluey sat with me there smoking and talking. We were interrupted by the Sheik's coffee-grinder whom we had seen after the mensafa working his mortar and pestle. He wore a red brocaded uniform. Now he saluted us and said, "Is Madam ready? I will guide her to the tents of the women."

I walked with her towards the women's tents, approaching to within about a hundred metres.

A young girl came out of the nearest tent. She was lovely, fair, not more than seventeen. It was my first glimpse of Jasmine. Her face, in the light of a naphtha flare, looked like a white rose. Chaluey and Jasmine joined hands. Together they disappeared into the tents of the women.

That night I slept alone, my tent open to the stars. I reflected that from time to time Englishmen find themselves in strange places—but I had little inkling that I had in fact passed through the looking-glass, leaving civilisation behind me, to witness events that no one may see unless he is a guest of the Beni Sakhr.

As always in Jordan, it was the call to prayer that woke me, but this was a gentler call than the harsh, metallic repetitions of Amman where the people are summoned to worship Allah through the loudspeaker system of the mosques. Here a human voice, unaided and undistorted, told the Sheik and his people that the dawn had come, and the prayer mats were ready.

I sprang up and raised my tent on its eastern aspect. The sun, a fiery ball, had already taken over its lordship of the sky. Bedouin, walking singly, their prayer mats carried on the right arm, were streaming out to the desert. Every now and then a man would stop, lay his rug and, facing Mecca, start to pray. The Moslems do not like being watched as they pray. I remembered this, closed my tent, and started shaving.

Half an hour later I stepped out into the clear grandeur of a Jordanian spring day. There was no sign of Chaluey. She was still, presumably, with Jasmine. It was impossible to approach the tents of the women for they were guarded, very quietly but effectively, by three of the Sheik's men who sat resting on their guns. They seemed to be half asleep, but they were not.

One of the men was of the Sheik's family and he allowed me to photograph himself and his friend. Both men were bearing German arms captured at Bab-el-Wad in Palestine in 1948. The Beni Sakhr had won this skirmish. I asked what had happened to the enemy survivors. Mohammed Al-Faiz looked at me. "There were no survivors," he said. It had been war to the death. The Bedouin, generous in all things, were mean about one. Fighting, they demand that every bullet shall kill. I examined

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their arms. They were old, almost antiquities now, but beautifully kept, ready for immediate, efficient use.

As Chaluey made no move from the tents of the women, I joined the Sheik's son at breakfast, eating dates and asses' milk.

He spoke of the terrors and hardships of the drought that had cursed Jordan for forty days in this, the rainy season. "Our people have to sell even their young working camels. The price in the markets in Amman and Madabar has dropped from over sixty dinar (a dinar is worth a pound) to under ten dinar." He looked grave and continued, "It is a great tragedy. It has even led to theft, unknown among our people. Last night we caught a thief."

I asked what had happened to him.

"He is hanging over there." The young man pointed.

For a moment I had the awful vision of a man's life having been forfeited, but it was not as bad as that. The man was tied by the wrists and was swinging from the stout branch of an olive tree. His feet were a few inches off the ground.

"How long has he been there?"

"Oh, not long, an hour perhaps, or more. He is to be flogged now. Come with me; I will show you."

Two of the Sheik's men carried out the sentence. They gave him thirty-six lashes. The man's back was a bleeding pulp. They cut him down. He could not stand, but crawled away on his knees to the refuge of a tent. He had uttered no sound during or after his ordeal. The Sheik's son was speaking. "He will never thieve again."

I believed that.

Chaluey came over at last from the women's tents. Together we walked up to the Sheik's fortress. The Sheik Mithcal Faiz was giving orders.

"There is a report of rain from Jerusalem. Our troubles may be nearly over. Today I have arranged for you to ride out over my farm lands. Tomorrow, if the rains come, my people will move deep into the desert and you can go with them, taking the desert road, and after that, travelling from oasis to oasis following the black tents. You come at a lucky time."

We rode out, a cavalcade now, over the mile upon mile of the Sheik's private land where grew barley and oats and, in the valley, oranges. The earth looked so dry that I thought it would soak up at one vast gulp days of steady rain. It was as we were riding home, towards evening, that the rains came.

The rain fell in an explosive, thunder-shaken torrent and the men of the cavalcade dismounted, kneeling in the newmade mud, without prayer mats, to thank Allah.

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That night the Sheik gave a feast to his sons and his people, and the whole camp feasted and drank arak until late, for Allah had been merciful and sent the rain at last.

Chaluey was the only woman at the feast. After a while I beckoned to her to follow me and led her towards the tents of the women. The Sheik understood. This was a feast for men.

A crescent moon and a very bright star shone in the heavens. The black tents of the women crouched silently, lit only by the occasional glimmer of a naphtha flare. I asked Chaluey if she could persuade Jasmine to come out and talk here under the stars for a while.

"I'll try. Wait a minute." She disappeared, returning four minutes later leading Jasmine. The guards had joined in the feast. We could hear the men singing now, singing the songs of women and wine that the Bedouin have sung since the days and nights of good Haroun Al-Raschid.

Jasmine spoke a little English, but she and Chaluey were able to supplement this with the language of the hands, so that a unique dialogue took place in which the long white hands of the Arab girl and the slim brown hands of Chaluey explained, expostulated, and described the scene or subject.

Jasmine was persuaded to lower her mantle and drop her veil. Then she smiled. The world seemed young again.

Chaluey, mischievous and quick, was talking. "She has a

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lover. A young man, handsome and brave, but not of the Beni Sakhr. He is a Bedouin of the Negeb. It is most romantic. Tomorrow, with the coming of the rain, the tents will be struck and a move made east, towards the Arabian border and beyond." Jasmine must have understood all this, for her long white arm pointed eastwards.

"Her lover plans, in the turmoil of the march, to join her disguised as a Beni Sakhr so that he can meet his love."

"What happens if he is discovered?"

It was Jasmine who answered. She lifted her head showing her lovely long neck. Then in one swift movement she drew her long fingers across her throat. That is what would happen to her lover.

These seemed to me to be deep and dangerous waters, but I made no comment. I asked what kind of a life it was that the women of the black tents lead in this Moslem year of grace, 1389 years after the birth of the Prophet.

Chaluey and Jasmine talked together in whispers, sign language mingling with the spoken word.

"She says the life of the women has not altered for five hundred years since the days before the Turks. There has been no education, no freedom for the women. She says the men prefer it that way. The husbands are jealous to the point of madness. They shoot first—and ask questions afterwards."

"Yes, but what does she do for pleasure? What kind of a life can she expect to lead?"

Again there was the swiftly moving pantomime. Jasmine said, "If the lord good, his woman happy."

Chaluey took up the story. "When the Bedouin are on the march, as they will be tomorrow, the women are more free. They cannot be kept in the tents, for the tents are folded on the backs of the camels. They are allowed to prepare food for the men in the open, and help in all ways."

"Are their men tender to them? Do they kiss them in love?"

Jasmine raised her mantle in modesty, understanding what I said. She whispered to Chaluey. "Yes, the young men, as lovers, will kiss them on the mouth, and tell them tales which are the love fables of the Bedouin. She says that the young Bedouin man is hard and brave, married to his gun, the friend of his camel. The first time he falls in love he melts like the snows of Lebanon in summer. He is very sweet."

"And when he marries?"

A shadow came over the face of Jasmine. But she spoke.

"Then he is her lord. She is his slave. She must bear children. The time for romance is over. That is life."

As were were talking, Jasmine was examining an evening bag

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of silver brocade that Chaluey had brought from her own country, Siam. She examined the powder, the lipstick, the mirror, the cigarettes, the diary. She spoke to Chaluey in an undertone.

"What does she say?"

"She says I live in another world. Her world is the world of the black tents, the men and their guns, the camels and their masters, who are also masters of their women and can thrash them as they thrash their asses, for disobedience."

"Ask her if she is ever happy."

Jasmine it was who laughed. And Chaluey said, "Of course she is happy. She is in love."

It was nearly midnight. The feast showed signs of ending. Jasmine would have to get back to her tent quickly, undetected. Chaluey took her by the hand. "We are going to have supper."

"What will you eat at this time of night?"

"Asses' milk and locusts."

"You can eat locusts?"

"Oh yes. We ate them last night. You roast them, tearing off the heads and the legs, with milk and a little sugar. Delicious." Chaluey laughed. Together they walked towards the black tents of the women.

I turned back to my own tent, knowing that a veil that had not been lifted for five centuries had been opened a fraction to allow me to peer for a moment into the hidden lives of the women of the Beni Sakhr.

And what was it that Jasmine had said of a man and his woman, of marriage? She had said that if the man was good, the woman was happy.

Simplicity under the stars.

It was not the call to prayer that woke me this next morning, but a great bustle and commotion from the open land that skirted the Sheik's fortress. I thought it must be the noise of the men already striking tent, for there had been another heavy thunderstorm in the night, and the desert was calling the nomads, beckoning to the Beni Sakhr Bedouin.

Incredibly the hills already had the faintest green mantle. The arid earth had sucked up the rain and was now thirstily awaiting another downpour. But the cause of all the bustle was something I had not expected. It was a sacrifice. A sacrifice here in the Jordan sunshine in gratitude to Allah, the merciful one, who had sent the rain.

I threw on a pair of trousers and a sweater, wrapping the kafear the Sheik had given me round my head. It seemed natural to wear the kafear here in Jordan.

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Even when I realised what was happening, I could scarcely believe it. Sacrifice is a rite of long ago, biblical, perhaps. But then Jordan is the Holy Land, a biblical country.

Two men were leading a fine fullgrown, pure white working camel into the space already cleared. The men formed a circle round the beast, the best that the Beni Sakhr possessed, for always Allah must be offered the best—that which his disciples most cherish. I noticed that two Jordanian policemen had come out from Madabar, but whether they had come to control the Sheik's men or assist them, I could not tell.

The camel was bidden to kneel and then to seat itself. It did so, unsuspecting, with the clumsy docility that camels so often reveal. With great difficulty, because of the lack of green fodder, this beast had been kept in prime condition for its ceremony today. Its feet were tightly bound with banana fibre, both its fore and hind feet, so that it could make no movement with its legs.

There was a pause now as the men stood around smoking and joking, for there were still some men out at prayer with their prayer mats, and they too would wish to see the death of this fine beast.

Before long the crowd was large enough. There were no women. This was man's business.

One of the men who had led in the camel whipped a golden dagger from the folds of his cloak. It was not more than nine inches in length, apart from the handle which was inlaid with the mother-of-pearl work, that they do in Jerusalem, between the gold.

The man held up the dagger for all to see. It gleamed wickedly in the sunshine. The camel seemed to understand now what was to happen, for it let out a piteous moan.

The man who held the dagger flashed it in the camel's eyes, then he drew it very gently along the camel's hide from the head, down the back, to the tail. The beast was in a frenzy now, but a frenzy of apprehension, not of pain.

Suddenly the man turned and with one deft stroke plunged the dagger into the soft white underbelly of the camel. A roar of approval went up from the assembled men.

The camel gave a roar of outraged pain and terror. Its grey tongue shot out. Its eyes appeared to leap from their sockets. Five times the dagger was withdrawn and plunged again. The fifth thrust must have killed it, for the hideous howling of the beast stopped. Its head sank into the now crimson sand. There it lay, twitching convulsively after death.

Yes, Allah, in his goodness, had sent the rain, and Allah had been thanked by a sacrifice that reflected the joy of his people.

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As soon as the sacrifice was over there was fresh commotion in the camp, for reports of more rain had come in from the desert. The waterholes were filling up. The desert would soon be alive again, giving forth its long hidden treasure of fruit and grass and water. The Beni Sakhr were in a ferment to be gone. They started loading their camels and overloading their asses till their knees shook.

I made my way to the Sheik's quarters to ask him whether I could in fact take Chaluey with me on the march. He said, "Oh yes. Why not? You are safe with my people. They know you now." The Beni Sakhr, he said, always look after their guests and friends.

I stayed on talking to the Sheik, who was staying at Madabar to supervise the sowing of his crops. I asked him with some trepidation, whether he did not find fifteen wives rather exacting. Were there not jealousies and storms in his household?

"Certainly not. Why should there be, my friend? It is natural for a man to have more than one woman. At least he needs two. One to bear him children, and one to amuse him. But a sheik must have more than two. It is expected. Our religion allows four wives. The others are . . ."

"Friends?"

The Sheik laughed. "Oh no. Friendship has nothing to do with love, as you must know. They are the women of the harem; there to please their prince."

"Don't you find that it is too easy to favour one unfairly?"

"That you must never do. A husband must be just. Women, of course, do not understand justice, but they appreciate it. It is a manly virtue. In any case, it is for the women to please their lord, not for me to please them. You Westerners should remember that." He paused and added, "A woman is only content when she is making a man happy. Remember this."

I made a note of it there and then.

I asked the Sheik how it was that my tent—a typical black tent of the Beni Sakhr—was so warm at night, so cool during the day.

He explained that the black tents, though they look ramshackle and even haphazard, are nothing of the kind. Carefully woven out of the wool of the black sheep and goats, they are superb all-weather shelters, defying those enemies of the Beni Sakhr, the desert dust, the cold, the rain, and even the sun in the hot months. Moreover, as either flap of the tent can be easily raised and the tent quickly turned, they could exclude the wind and invite the warm sun with remarkable efficiency.

The Sheik walked over with me to see the strange scene which was now being enacted. A nation of nomads on the move.

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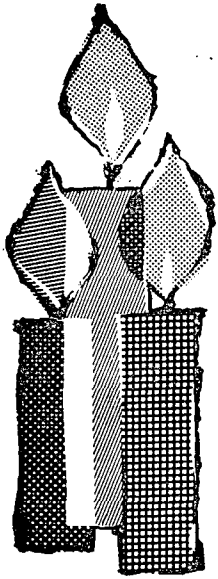

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As the tents were struck and the camels loaded, for the first time I saw the Beni Sakhr women herded together in a black circle. Jasmine was among them and I could not help wondering whether her intrepid lover had made his clandestine move and joined the men. But Chaluey said, "No, not yet, but very soon, as we move off."

In time some order emerged from the chaos. One huge cavalcade was formed. Chaluey, to my surprise, was joined by Jasmine and allowed to ride with us. The camels seemed more docile now, as if the sacrifice of the white camel in the morning had warned them of the omnipotence of man.

We had been travelling less than an hour when Jasmine gave a cry and spoke to Chaluey. Chaluey turned to me. "He is with us. The tall young one riding with the group to the north." I followed the direction in which she pointed. There was no mistaking the man she meant. He had a fine carriage and, in spite of his red-and-white kafear and his long white robe, he did not look to me like a Beni Sakhr. But then I knew he was an interloper. Those who rode with him seemed to suspect nothing, or, if they did, they made no move . . .

The sign language between Chaluey and Jasmine quickened. Though I could not tell what they were saying, I knew that Jasmine was excited by the proximity of her lover and the danger of their escapade.

The cavalcade halted by a large waterhole. We were to rest here for the night. The tents were hastily erected, and I sought my own. Chaluey came to talk with me after supper as usual, sitting there crosslegged on the sheepskin rugs, sipping the Bedouin coffee, describing how life was lived in the tents of the women.

She was intrigued by the romance of her friend Jasmine.

"He is very handsome, don't you think? A man any woman might crave. Tonight they will be together."

"You had better stay here tonight, protocol or no protocol. If Jasmine is with her lover, anything may happen. One of the sheiks has an eye on her. Do you really think he will get away with it? In any case, you're safer here."

Chaluey laughed. "Whatever my lord wishes," she said, mimicking the Beni Sakhr women.

We thought no more that night of the brave young man from the Negeb who had dared to penetrate the black tents of the Beni Sakhr for love of Jasmine . . .

It must have been just before dawn that I was suddenly aware that a man was running past our tent. Chaluey woke too, but I pushed her back, lifting the tent flap as I did so. At that moment

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two shots rang out. The figure, not fifty yards from where I was, staggered, then crashed to the ground, motionless.

Chaluey screamed to me to come inside, but I was already running out to the figure that had fallen.

In a moment I was stooping over him. His face was sunk in the sand. I pulled him over by his arm so that I could see his eyes. My stomach turned cold inside me.

It was the handsome young Bedouin of the Negeb, Jasmine's lover, still warm but undoubtedly dead.

We were never able to get at the truth concerning the shooting of Jasmine's lover. A marauder and interloper had been surprised in the tents of the women. He had fled. When called upon to halt, he had not done so. The guards had then fired, as was their duty.

That was what had happened, we were told. But I could not help wondering if the disguise of the young man had not been detected as he rode with the Beni Sakhr the previous afternoon. Besides, the dialect of the Negeb is quite different from that of the Beni Sakhr.

Whatever the truth might be, there were other matters to think about. The irresistible urge of nomads on the move could not be halted even for a matter of hours. Early next morning camp was struck and we thrust out again eastwards towards the Arabian border.

For the first fifty miles or so we followed the desert "road." It was not a road as we understand it. It was a broad sunbaked track where the sand had been hardened by the addition of earth. Every hundred metres two white stones, one on either side, marked its course. If one missed these little guides, one was apt to be led off the main road along a tributary track that might lead to a small oasis—or might not . . .

On the third day the desert road ended abruptly and without warning. We were moving through the desert now by instinct and the sun during the day, checking our position by the stars at night. This is how the Bedouin have always travelled, trusting in Allah, but using their great and detailed local knowledge to ensure that they would reach water by dusk. I never discovered how they contrived to do this, but they always did.

Chaluey and I were now living the life of the Beni Sakhr Bedouin, eating as they eat, in the morning and at night, not breaking the march during the day except for a few minutes. I wore the kafear now, not because I wanted to ape the Beni Sakhr, but because it was supremely comfortable and convenient for this kind of life. Its long folds could be worn loosely at the side over

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the shoulders, or wrapped round the ears and chin for warmth, or high over the mouth, up to the eyes, to keep out the desert sand which was now starting to blow.

During our first days both Chaluey and I came to love the desert and regard it as a friend, but suddenly, in a matter of minutes, it became an enemy. It was, I realised, as volatile, as unpredictable as the Arab crowds of Damascus or Baghdad. There had been no rain for forty-eight hours and the desert had taken the late, heavy rains, swallowing them as a starving man would swallow meat.

The sands looked as dry as ever. When the wind blew hard from the north, within minutes our whole lives were changed. No words can describe the discomforts of the desert dust when it is blowing hard. The dust enters your clothes, penetrating everywhere, up your nostrils, blinding your eyes, making your mouth a gritty parched cavern. Hastily we put up a little tent into which Chaluey was huddled with some of the women, including Jasmine.

I was interested to know how Jasmine had taken the death of her lover. I saw that she was dry-eyed and proud. I asked Chaluey what she had said to her of the tragedy.

" She says that he loved her and was leaving her when he was shot. She hopes she may bear him a son. No one can take that away from her."

So that was the way it was with Jasmine, the lovely young Bedouin girl who had broken the laws of her people, and paid the penalty.

The sandstorm that had brought such hellish discomfort was gone as quickly as it had come. That evening, when all was still again, with the stillness of the desert that one can feel, Jasmine asked us whether we had smoked the nargileh, the Arabian hookah. We had not.

She brought three pipes into our tent, two for us, and one for herself.

My pipe was cunningly ornamented with gold leaf in the manner of the Lebanese goldsmiths, the pipes of Chaluey and Jasmine were of silver, overdecorated. We smoked the tobacco pleasantly cooled by the water.

I thought nothing of this until I noticed the change in Jasmine's expression. For her young face that had been hardened by grief took on the expression of bliss. She stretched her body in a movement of enjoyment and surrender. Her eyes and lips showed clearly that the smoking had wiped away the shadow of her awful experience.

I smoked more critically—and then I thought I knew what it was that made this tobacco a seduction. For it had, unmistakably,

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that sweet, faintly sickly smell that I had known so well in Siam, the smell of opium. I asked Jasmine about this.

She smiled. "It is grown in the Balker plateau. They let the white poppies grow with the tobacco."

We smoked the nargileh each night then, and the days became but a prelude for the strange enchantment of the evening. But this was no ordinary smoking, for the man under the influence of this pipe became a hero, living in a golden world, and women became creatures groping for love . . .

I learnt the Bedouin tricks, how to roll myself cocoon-like into my robes if the dust blew. Chaluey learnt to cook the desert dishes. The calendar no longer meant a thing. Each day merged into the next by the starlit link of the night. The weather—the sun, sand, wind, rain—dominated and dictated our lives.

Usually the day followed a familiar pattern, but one day soon after our introduction to the nargileh, a little after noon, some of our men left the main column and started firing towards the north. Straining my eyes I could just see a group of men, mounted on camels, moving in the same direction as ourselves. They turned away very quickly. I asked one of our men what it was all about.

"They were trespassers. This is our land."

"But could you not have spoken to them?"

This provoked that smile that is all Arabian, a blending of mischief and mockery. "Our guns speak for us," he said.

Trying to determine our position on the map, I thought we must be approaching the Saudi Arabian border. The Beni Sakhr would move over unquestioned. They had always refused to be documented in the modern manner—no passports, no visas, no identity cards, no records of their dealings in camels, sheep, and goats. Difficult people for the Customs and the tax collector.

But could Chaluey and I slip through? I doubted it.

We made our decision to return. Jasmine wept. And one of the sheiks, who had become our companion, said to me, "Tell your people that the Bedouin and the British are still friends."

I was glad to hear that. It was said with simple sincerity.

It took us a week to reach Amman again, with its newspapers, taxis, and manmade troubles.

I looked back on our sojourn with the Beni Sakhr, and I was proud to have made friends with the sons of the men who had ridden with Feisal and Lawrence in the old days when the star of Britain shone clear and bright in the Eastern sky.

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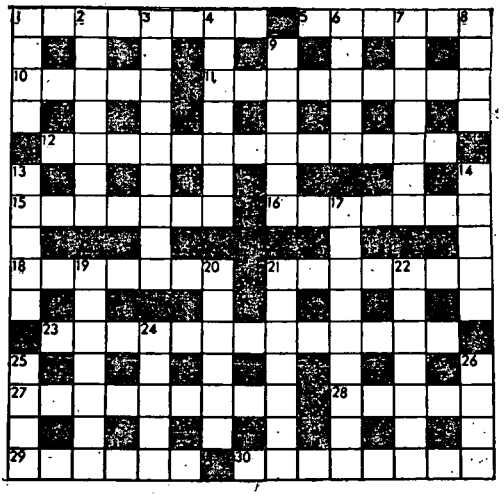

ACROSS

1 Costume for the whist drive? (8).

5 We follow a cab backwards for a way of calculating (6).

10 It sounds a shady card game (5).

11 A tinny tone, retuned, is still negligible (9).

12 Whichever it is, home's best (8, 5).

15 Lady spectator, perhaps (7).

16 Characteristic of the Madrid XI? (7).

18 Lotteries from Singapore ? (7).

21 Stout fellows, they need to be (7).

23 Do they transport only beautiful girls? (5, 8).

27 Bitter sweets (4, 5).

28 She literally conceals the chosen few (5).

29 Make certain (6).

30 Anon, dyes may become soothing (8).

DOWN

1 You can get really immersed in this game (4).

2 Top card, thrown twice, is lowest (4-3).

3 Sprinter's flower (9).

4 For batsmen, and, doubtless, especially the Taverners (7).

6 A popular dog these days (5).

7 China, it makes an Italian tipple (7).

8 Heaven for terriers? (4).

9 Does this sportsman corner his prey? (6).

13 A freak, but gamesome (5).

14 A nice girl, but something's wrong (5).

17 Not mercenary, yet it's aimed at the gold (9).

19 Gambols of fifty in Frisco (7).

20 "Salmon and —— have their season in Lent" (Proverb) (6).

21 The foreign fish is more than toxic (7).

22 In Paradise, or Paris, the fields start from an English cathedral (7).

24 Duck down in the bed (5).

25 Resolute venison (4).

26 Falconer's girl (4).

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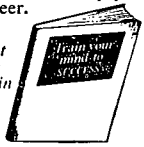

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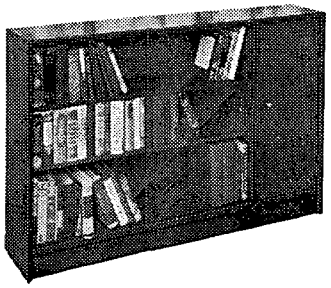

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